

DOCTORAL THESIS

An exploration of the perceptions of future 'eminence' among highachieving secondary schoolgirls, through 'possible selves' narratives

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An exploration of the perceptions of future 'eminence' among high-achieving secondary schoolgirls, through 'possible selves' narratives

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of EdD

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Abstract

In the UK, girls perform highly at secondary school; they have been the success story of education in recent times. However, they also make up only 17% of 'top jobs' in the FTSE 100 in the UK (Martinson, 2012); are completely outnumbered in Westminster (22% of UK MPs) and constitute only 13.6% of senior judiciary positions in Law (Fawcett Society, 2013). There remains a considerable mismatch between girls' academic success and subsequent levels of career achievement.

This research project explores the perceptions of future eminence held by high-achieving secondary schoolgirls. A 'possible selves' story-writing methodology was used: 10 Year 10 (age 14 and 15) participants were asked to imagine themselves and write about a day in their possible future as an eminent woman in their chosen field. This data was analysed using 'multiple textual analytic frames' (Wickens, 2011), which involved a constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967); textual discursive analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and literary analysis (Vandergrift, 1990).

This study concludes that high-achieving secondary schoolgirls hold ambivalent perceptions of future eminence. They foresee a range of the difficulties and strains detailed by the real experiences of the women in the 'Opt-Out' literature e.g. long working hours, exhaustion. They also foresee the potential for exciting careers and creativity. And where they do foresee future

challenges in an eminent career, they do not position these as 'external' barriers e.g. they do not see gender as a barrier, nor do they imagine limiting social structures or workplace inequalities. For the participants in this study, barriers to future eminence have been internalised, echoing the conclusions of Ringrose (2007), Pomerantz and Raby (2011), Beck (2001) and Bauman (2008) regarding the neo-liberal transformation of the 'social' into the 'individual.'

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Glossary of Terms

AS/A level – Advanced supplementary/Advanced level general certificate of education qualifications, taken by students in their final two years at secondary school or college, aged between 16 and 18 years old

CAT – Cognitive Abilities Test

DCSF - Department for Schools Children and Families in England

DfEE - Department for Education and Employment

EdD - Doctorate in Education

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

Key stage – A phrase used to group periods of schooling e.g. Years 10 and 11 (aged 14-16) constitutes key stage 4 (KS4)

Nvivo – A type of computer software package used to help code qualitative data

Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education

SATs – Standard Assessment Tests. These are taken at different stages of students' school career. The KS2 SATs are taken at the end of students' final year of primary school

SEAL – Social and emotional aspects of learning

PLTS – Personal Learning and thinking skills

Year 10 – Students who are in their fourth year at secondary school, aged 14-15 years old

Chapter 1: Rationale

1.1 The importance of telling stories

As an English teacher, I am fascinated by stories. Stories are the way in which we make meaning and create patterns and structures. I am interested by the stories of 'self' we narrate internally and the culture we form by, 'the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves' (Geertz, 1975). My work as a teacher and as an EdD student revolves around asking questions of the stories we hear and tell: who is telling the story? Whose voices are heard? Who are the characters and how does the narrative construct them? What are the underlying themes and ideas? Beyond these initial questions, comes a range of even richer lines of enquiry: Where are the gaps? What is silenced? Who is omitted? It was through a focus upon these secondary questions that led towards my interest in high ability girls and their future eminence. However, before I get to this 'story', I want to begin by tracing my own.

1.2 'My Story'

Embarking on this EdD arose from recognising a 'space' in my professional life. I was in the second year of my teaching career and I wanted to find a space to discuss education, which recognised my current practice as well as my theoretical interests and would allow me to explore the interplay between the two areas. Through exploring my own practice with reference to an

increasing range of theoretical material, the EdD created this discursive space for me and began to populate it with stories of researchers and their work. During the course of my EdD studies, I have gone from being a teacher in their second year of practice, to working as a Second in Department, to supporting colleagues in their own early years in teaching, and my research interests have grown and developed in line with my growing professional experience. However, ultimately a play, a photograph and a critical incident prompted me towards the research questions that I have gone on to explore.

The revival of Caryl Churchill's *'Top Girls'* (1982) was a significant catalyst in my thinking about women, eminence and education. The play tells a number of stories. Act One depicts a dinner party where a range of famous historical women gather to celebrate the fictional Marlene's promotion at the 'Top Girls' employment agency. Over the course of Act one, each of the historical figures, including Pope Joan, Lady Nijo and Isabella Bird, tells their story. The women's stories feature their own successes alongside narratives of abandoned children, cruelty, suffering and guilt. The act ends in chaos. Acts two and three juxtapose scenes from Marlene's working life at 'Top Girls' against the home life she has left behind, including her own daughter, Angie. The play ends with the abandoned child's haunting words suggesting that what she has seen, or that she prophetically sees, is: 'frightening... frightening...' Churchill's play resists any easy or simplistic reduction regarding its positioning on women and success. Certainly, it is clear that a misreading would be to see the play and especially the first act, as some have done, as a celebration of female progression. Churchill, through the character of Marlene, raises questions regarding what success might be: 'Success is

very....' Rather than reproducing a simplistic linear narrative of female progress, Churchill challenges this through temporal distortion meaning the events of the final act happen, chronologically, a year prior to the events of the second act. Similarly, through use of 'doubling' whereby the same actress plays more than one role, she seems to be signposting the continuities between the experiences and difficulties of the historical, 'eminent' women and the present day. The play led me to think carefully about how many 'stories' we hear about the realities of life as a successful woman; have we come to expect a certain script? Seeing the play in light of its original 1980s context, I also began to be interested in how young women in our current context might view the idea of being a 'successful woman': might their ideas reflect a move away from the striving individualism of *'Top Girls'* original context?

Secondly, a photograph prompted my thinking. In May 2010, I saw the photograph of the new coalition government cabinet and read the analysis 'Four women were appointed to the cabinet yesterday out of 23 cabinet members.' (Dodd and Gentleman, 2010). I had heard the statistics about women not making it to the boardroom, which remain problematic today: 'Women make up 17% of board directors in FTSE 100 companies' (The Fawcett Society, 2013); that women weren't represented frequently enough in public office. However, there was something particularly stark and arresting about the cabinet photo: four women had made it into the coalition cabinet in a total of 23. Back at work in a very successful girls' school, I looked around at the highly able young women I was teaching and wondered what was happening between the oft-quoted 'girls out performing boys' narrative of our British classrooms (Shepherd, 2010, 2011; Berliner, 2008) and the astonishing

lack of representation by women in the British government – and indeed often at the highest levels of business and society (The Fawcett Society, 2013).

Finally, a critical incident led me to question whether there were stories beyond the simple celebratory story of girls' educational success that were not being voiced and which may or may not be connected to the subsequent dearth of women in the 'top jobs.' In 2008/9, whilst working in an 'outstanding' girls' Catholic comprehensive school in London as an English teacher, I became conscious of a number of issues and tensions within my practice and experience as a teacher. I was teaching two groups of highly able young women: the highest ability group in Year 11, who were taking early entry AS English Literature having completed GCSE in Year 10, and the second highest ability group in Year 10, who were to take early entry GCSE English at the end of that year. Teaching these highly able young women was, without question, the highlight of my career to date: they were consistently creative, intelligent and enthusiastic. However, I also noticed that they seemed to have a troubled relationship with being the 'highest achievers' within the school. A number of the students did not want to be in the 'top set'; they spoke about the stress of high expectations. Perhaps the biggest confirmation that there was a difficulty came in June 2009. The Year 10 students were taking their English Language paper 2 GCSE examinations. They were very well prepared and as their subsequent results testify (14 A*, 10 A, 4 B) more than capable of sitting the examination; however, during the examination two of the students from this class broke down in tears in the examination hall. One of them was inconsolable regarding the fact that she 'did not want to take the exam early', she wanted to sit the exam alongside the rest of her year group, those not

deemed such high-achievers, at the end of Year 11. Another student from the same class broke down in tears when she realised that she had attempted the wrong poetry question. I began to question whether this was as a result of stress; a mismatch between their seeming 'cognitive' readiness and emotional immaturity or a struggle with their 'identity' as highly able learners.

I was deeply affected by this incident; it led me to question many things. Had I been overly fixated on the students attaining high grades? As a school, had we failed to develop students' resilience alongside their academic talents? Had my own anxieties regarding their grades within our 'performative' culture been transmitted to the students? What was the relationship between student well-being and high achievement? However, it was a subsequent descriptive writing activity with these students that further crystallised my interests for this small-scale research project. The students were asked to 'describe their future selves' with reference to career and family life; my intention being to explore the nature of their aspirations and feelings in relation to these ambitions. The students' narratives were varied; however, I was struck by the correlation between the students who described their 'happy', 'satisfied' future selves and the middle-range career aspirations they held for themselves. Why didn't these highly able young women dream of eminence in their future field? Had their experiences of 'high achievement' to date negatively coloured their perceptions? However, in order to begin to place these experiences in context, we need to understand the way in which girls' education in Britain has changed and developed.

1.3 'Their Story': What is the history of girls' education in Britain?

Although we might now see girls' examination success as a yearly inevitability, it is worth remembering that this is a recent phenomenon in the history of education in England (Hilton and Hirsch, 2000; Robinson, 2010). Although the 19th century saw a move towards advocating for female education beyond primary level, by the 1864 Schools Enquiry Commission there were still only 12 public secondary schools for girls in England and Wales and in 1868 the Taunton Commission reported, 'damningly on the education of girls in England' (Robinson, 2010: xiii). In 1918 the compulsory age of education was raised to 14 and by 1944, secondary education was finally free and the leaving age was 15. In terms of higher education, it is worth noting the relatively recent history of women's acceptance: it was not until 1948 that female students at the University of Cambridge were 'officially allowed to graduate' (Robinson, 2010). The legislation instrumental in the development of women's rights in being educated for subsequent opportunities in the workplace can really only be traced from the 1970s onwards, with the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). With the advent of this legal emphasis upon equality, increased attention began to be given to girls' experiences of formal schooling and the gap between genders (Spender, 1982; Sharpe, 1976; Stanworth, 1986).

Weiner (1997) outlines the piecemeal approach adopted by different local education authorities towards policies relating to gender, class and ethnicity throughout the 1980s, which she sees as being curtailed by the educational reforms, including the advent of the National Curriculum in 1988. This meant, in her view, that where there had been interest and scrutiny regarding

methods and materials used in the classroom, evaluation of gender parity was now sought through a narrowed focus on quantifiable results. The Equality of Opportunity Commission/Ofsted report which followed signposts the beginning of girls' examination ascendancy and the concomitant insecurities which have arisen regarding boys' comparative under-performance (Younger and Warrington, 2005; Ofsted, 1996, 2008).

1.4 'Our Story': the current picture – heroines or antagonists?

The issues surrounding 'gender' and 'achievement' have tended to be dominated in recent times by the 'problem with boys' (Epstein, 1998). This move gained momentum with the 1996 EOC/Ofsted report, 'The Gender Divide,' and was affirmed by the educational discourse of the New Labour government in 1997. Subsequent reports by Ofsted and the DfES/DCSF: 'Boys' Achievement in secondary school' (2008); 'Raising Boys' Achievement' (2005) and 'The Gender Agenda' (2009) maintained and developed the focus on the 'boy problem.'

In recent years, there has been a familiar repetition in the news stories surrounding GCSE, and increasingly A-level results days, in the UK and 2013 was no exception: 'GCSE results 2013: girls stretch to record lead over boys' (Paton, 2013); 'This year shows that girls are ahead of boys by more than they have been for a decade. While 72.3% of girls got A*-C grades, only 63.7% of boys did. The gap was even more noticeable for the top grades where 8.3% of girls gained A*s compared with 5.3% of boys' (Chalabi, 2013). On one level then, girls are, as Skelton, Francis and Read (2010) identify, the success story of a neoliberal discourse. However, girls have not simply been lauded as

'heroines' and their success applauded. A competing story, which critiques the 'feminisation' of examining systems and positions boys as, 'the true victims of discrimination' (Phillips, 2002; Skelton, 2011; Sewell, 1996) has arisen. This view blames those within our education system for failing to heed 'warnings' that the move from O-level to GCSE 'with its emphasis on coursework rather than final exams, would favour girls' (Robinson, 2010). In this story, girls are implicitly the antagonists keeping boys from their educational successes. Whilst working on this EdD, the landscape of education has continued to shift, bringing a return to an end-of-course examining system and the eradication of coursework, spearheaded by the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, who pledged to reverse a system which has previously been blamed for boys' under-performance: 'GCSEs: Gove pledges 'challenging' exam changes' (Coughlan, 2014). In all of this, it struck me that the academic success of girls was being treated as an overly simplistic story: in a field which continues to be dominated by the 'performative' discourse of standards and results (Ball, 1999), it seems the tendency is to seek comfort in girls' success, to sit back and enjoy the annual media imagery of girls jumping for joy and clutching examination results and not to trouble the surface with further exploration, research or investment.

1.5 How does the story end? Abruptly!

Looking at the way in which 'girls' are positioned in the media in terms of educational success, we would expect the narrative to continue and end in a 'happily ever after' of considerable career reward and status. However, women continue to occupy only 17% of 'top jobs' in the FTSE 100 in the UK (Martinson, 2012); occupy 5% of Editor roles in the media; account for 22% of

the UKs MPs and 13.6% of senior judiciary positions in Law (Fawcett Society, 2013). Yet, it seems that we are happy to be myopic on this front and to be content with the high-achievement of British schoolgirls and graduates as evidence of gender equality. It was a desire to look beyond this point - which we so often see as the successful 'end-point' of girls' educational success - that really motivated me towards this project. Perhaps the timeliness of my project can be illustrated through the publication of Ofsted's report: 'Girls' Career Aspirations' (2011). This could be seen to mark a shift towards recognising, and paying attention to, the disjunction between girls' high-achievement in school and subsequent absence from the highest echelons of career success: 'Young women achieve better educationally than boys at the age of 16. A higher proportion of girls than boys continue to degree level. Their early success, however, does not translate into similar advantages in later life' (Ofsted, 2011: 4). With a discourse that has been dominated by league tables, standards and accountability, discussions of the aspects of education, which cannot be neatly measured or credentialed, have been heavily sidelined. This perhaps includes those aspects, e.g. consideration of preparing for future eminence, which might need a longer-term focus beyond the accountability measures of GCSE and A level scores.

1.6 'This Story': Why this story told in this way?

To return to my initial focus upon narrative gaps and silences, I see a number of fascinating spaces in the story we currently tell about girls' education and women's career paths, not least in the silence surrounding the mismatch between the number of girls achieving at the highest levels educationally and the numbers of women subsequently achieving at the highest levels in the

workplace. Whilst mindful of the idea that women must of course be able to 'choose' whether replicating a male-defined career path is something they wish to pursue, I would argue that until there has been parity of gender at the highest echelons of all fields, then there is a sense in which women are not really yet able to make a completely free 'choice': some 'choices' remain unrealistic. So it was for these reasons, alongside the reasons previously outlined in this chapter and a powerful sense from my own professional practice, that I wanted to hear from high-ability girls about their own perceptions of a life of future eminence (another interesting silence in the current narrative). The aim of this study is to explore the current perceptions of high-ability girls regarding their own imagined future as an eminent woman, using a 'possible selves' narrative method. More specifically, this led me to formulate the following research questions:

1.6.1 Research questions

- To what extent do high-achieving secondary schoolgirls hold positive perceptions of an 'eminent' possible self?
- To what extent do the students' narratives predict/reflect the internal/external barriers to female eminence depicted in the literatures?
- Do the 'possible selves' narratives of high-achieving secondary schoolgirls predict any of the concerns/difficulties experienced by 'eminent' women in the 'Opt-Out' literature?

1.6.2 Theoretical Framework

Having explored the existing literatures, which I shall return to discuss fully in Chapter 2, I felt that adopting a feminist, post-structuralist theoretical positioning would allow me to interrogate rather than accept the current easy categorisation of girls' educational success set in opposition to boys' underachievement. This positioning allows me to question the validity of the accepted neo-liberal 'metanarrative' Lyotard (1984) which positions girls as unproblematic, educational 'winners' and their absence from subsequent eminent positions as the result of individual failing or choice. Post-Structuralism, in line with Derrida (1978), means that I am privileging the construction of self and identity through language. It means that I am also coming from a position which seeks to explore, and potentially disrupt, existing binary oppositions: success/failure, achievement/underachievement. Furthermore, this theoretical framework leads me to see an inevitable 'intertextuality,' (rooted in the idea that meaning is constructed by and inevitably situated within texts) in the literatures reviewed, the texts produced and the 'possible self' stories told by participants.

Adopting a feminist position allows me to foreground the importance of a gendered reading, beyond the obvious point that I am exploring an area where gender is an explicit focus; it allows me to question literature and discourse which pertains to be aiming at increasing understanding of eminent women or their lack, but where the underlying ideas exacerbate, rather than ameliorate gender stereotypes and limiting beliefs regarding women's social standing (Winter, 2014; Adams, 2013). Inherent in this feminist positioning is an understanding of Butler's (1990) identification of the 'performative' nature of

‘gender’ as being ‘performed’ rather than part of who one ‘is.’ Perhaps an inconsistency with my theoretical positioning in this study is that, whilst Butler (1990) or Walkerdine (1990) might foreground the multiplicity of ‘identities’ held by the subject in terms of race, class etc., in this study I am largely isolating the ‘gendered’ identity. However, by positioning myself within this framework I am acknowledging that there are many different stories which could be told, including stories of class or race, but that in this small-scale study I am privileging the ‘story’ of gender.

1.7 Overview of the study

This study begins in Chapter 2 by critically exploring a range of literatures, which pertain to the existing material on ‘female eminence’, ‘external’ barriers to women’s eminence; ‘internal’ barriers, and literature that details existing ‘possible selves’ studies and their findings.

The methodology, which will be explored in Chapter 3, adopts a ‘possible selves’ (Markus and Nurius, 1986) story-writing approach. This methodological choice provided congruence with my theoretical positioning by foregrounding the importance of narrative and text; by giving significant and open voice to the girls who are at the heart of this issue and by allowing for the ‘petits recits’ (Lyotard, 1984) of high-ability girls to potentially disrupt the unquestioned metanarrative of girls and their progress in England.

In Chapter 4, I detail the analysis and findings from the 10 narrative accounts, collected from students after an hour of ‘possible self’ story-writing, that I explored using: constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967);

discursive textual analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and traditional literary analysis (Vandergrift, 1990). Again, the use of multiple analytic methods here, in line with Wickens (2011), was in keeping with a theoretical position which seeks to allow for 'multiplicity' and to be skeptical towards 'totalising metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984). Finally, in Chapter 5, I return to my research questions and suggest my conclusions and recommendations for my own future practice and beyond.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Within this chapter I intend to critically discuss a range of literature in order to position the ideas, themes and thinking which will underpin my exploration of my participants' narratives. I will begin by exploring the precedence for discussing 'female eminence' and the ways in which this has been explored and defined. Secondly, I will trace the relevant threads in the literature, exploring the existence of 'external barriers' which have limited women's progression to eminence in the past and which continue to exert influence in the present. In my exploration of this literature, I will also interrogate some of the less overt 'social discourses' which impact upon women's pursuit of career success at the highest level. Thirdly, I will review the writing that has highlighted what are often seen as the 'internal' barriers to women's achievement. In this section, I will also attempt to draw attention to the gendered assumptions and underlying narratives at work in much of this literature. Finally, I will provide an overview of the 'possible selves' studies that have explored issues pertaining to gender, work, family and 'feared selves.'

Firstly, in reviewing the literature of 'Female Eminence,' I will explore research relating to the growth and development of women who have attained 'eminent'

status. I will then explore literature relating to 'external' barriers to highly able young women attaining eminence: I will use this set of literature to illuminate questions relating to workplace inequities and social constructs, which might contribute to the limiting factors upon women. I will also look at literature pertaining to the 'internal' difficulties experienced by successful women, with a view to examining which of these traits remain relevant for highly able young women today. Finally, I will explore the existing 'possible selves' studies, in order to outline the existing field of knowledge and raise critical questions regarding girls' perceptions of their futures.

2.2 Eminent women

The use of the term 'eminence' to describe 'a position of superiority, high rank, or fame' (Collins, 2010) has a historical precedence in its usage for accounts of women and their achievements. From as early as 1869, Parton defined 'eminence' as, 'the lives and achievements of those women of our time who have distinguished themselves in their various occupations and conditions in life,' (Parton, 1869: v) while in the same year Galton discusses male 'Hereditary Genius', a term more frequently applied to high achieving men than women. The discussion of female eminence was developed throughout the 20th Century from the 1913 New York Times article, 'A study of Eminent Women,' to Kerr's (1985) developed exploration of the early lives of 'Eminent Women.'

It is worth examining why the historical precedent has been to discuss 'eminence,' rather than 'high achievement', 'success' or 'fame.' The etymology of 'eminence' is from the Latin 'eminere': 'to stand out' (Klein, 1971:

244). Although the authors who have employed this term have not acknowledged its origin in their usage, it does signpost the original connotations of the term and its distinction from 'achievement.' Part of this study will involve looking at high-ability girls' perceptions of future 'eminence' with its involvement of being recognised by others, as opposed to high achievement which does not carry the same social recognition as a necessary condition: I will be using a definition in keeping with the term's etymology. The use of 'eminence' in both Kerr (1985) and Arnold et al. (1996) is focused upon 'career;' I intend to use the term with the same focus in my study.

Female eminence remains an underdeveloped research area (Noble et al., 1999; Yewchuk et al., 2001) 'the majority of renowned individuals have been men, and it is from their lives that much of our knowledge about talent development has been derived' (Goertzel and Goertzel, 1962; Gardner 1993, cited in Noble et al., 1999: 141). Yewchuk et al. (2001) cites Simonton (1994) to suggest that 'about 97% of the illustrious people in Western history have been males' (Yewchuk et al., 2001: 30). This fact takes on even greater resonance as we can no longer point to a short-fall in the standards reached by girls in compulsory education or at university: the high-achievers in our classrooms are not going on to fully realise their career potential.

Despite the fact that 'women's experiences were largely overlooked in studies and theories of talent development' (Noble et al., 1999: 41), there are some studies to have done so. Kerr (1985), Gavin et al. (2007) and more recently Reis and Sullivan (2009) have used biographies and autobiographies to analyse the lives of eminent women.

Kerr (1985) identifies a range of continuities between this diverse group of women in their formative years: Time alone, voracious reading, being different or special, individualised instruction, same-sex education, difficult adolescence, separateness and the ability to avoid confluence, taking responsibility for oneself, love through work, refusal to acknowledge the limitations of gender, influential mentors, the need to grow 'thorns' and 'shells', integration of roles e.g. motherhood and work and the ability to fall in love with an idea (Kerr, 1985). Above all other aspects Kerr (1985) goes on to emphasise the importance of 'falling in love with an idea' to the well-being of an 'eminent woman.' She cites Torrance's (1979) definition of falling in love with an idea as being akin to, 'the process of discovering one's calling or vocation' (Kerr, 1985: 90) and makes clear that it is this well-defined 'sense of purpose', (ibid: 90) which will go on to sustain the gifted girl in her life.

In their seminal work 'Remarkable Women', Arnold et al. (1996) explore the lives of a wider range of women, beginning to look at the impact of race and socio-economic factors, as well as gender on women's rise to eminence. Noble et al. returns to this theme and develops views on the need for highly able girls to 'cultivate a number of protective factors known collectively as resilience' (1999: 144) in their 1999 paper 'To thine own self be true: Female talent development.' Most recently, Yewchuk et al. (2001) have studied eminent women cross-culturally by looking at the experiences of women featured in the Canadian and Finnish versions of 'Who's Who' and drawing conclusions relating to consistent 'facilitative' and 'barrier' factors of eminence

across cultures, concluding that, 'both groups ranked their own personality first, followed by hard work' (2001:102).

Yewchuck et al. (2001) also draws attention to the fact that even feminist literatures have 'to a large extent, neglected the study of exceptional achievement in women. The focus of most feminist authors has been on the inadequacies of contemporary society and its repressive effects on female expression and satisfaction' (2001: 90). Yet Kerr et al. (1991) have drawn our attention to the importance of paying attention to the women who have succeeded and in sharing their stories with gifted young women, 'Gifted girls will often see themselves in the stories of the lives of eminent women. Biographies provide not only a narrative of the events of the lives of talented women but also show the necessary steps to achieve success in many professional fields' (Kerr, 1991:6).

Finally, the writing of Kerr (1985) Noble et al. (1999), Pinker (2008), Hewlett (2007), Arnold et al. (1996) and Reiss and Sullivan (2009) consider the validity of our current conception of 'eminence' in relation to female achievement. Kerr (1991) foregrounds the sense of debate regarding our exploration of female success: 'Many researchers cannot agree on how to study women's abilities, and many feminist researchers claim that women's achievement should not be measured by the same scales as male achievement' (Kerr, 1991:1). To measure female success in a way which just uses the existing 'scale' fails to acknowledge the reality of women's achievement in more than one sphere e.g. beyond the career sense of achievement. Reiss and Sullivan (2009) have, with this in mind explored the achievements of women who have 'diversified' their creative talents and found that rather than there being evidence of a

disabling lack of single-focus: 'some eminent women believe that this diversification of talents actually has a positive impact on their work' (Reiss and Sullivan, 2009: 496). Although they acknowledge that once again, this may not necessarily represent a 'choice' as much as a means of balancing a range of expectations and competing demands.

'Post-feminist' thinkers, who deny the existence of continued inequality and promote the tenets of choice, have also taken up this sense that women's achievement should be measured differently. Pinker (2009) argues vehemently in this vein against viewing women 'as frustrated versions of this male model' (Pinker, 2009:17) advocating for women's choice and inherent difference, 'in interests, priorities, and appetites for risk' (Pinker, 2009: 33) and therefore denying that discussing women's eminence in the same terms as men's is either useful or appropriate.

Feminist thinking would potentially suggest that the 'individualistic' conception of 'eminence' also stands in opposition to the 'solidarity and socialism' of 'the early women's liberation movement' (Cochrane, 2012: xviii) and is more in keeping with the Post-Thatcher era which saw this ethos 'pushed to the margins' (*ibid*: xviii) with its rampant individualism. However, Kerr (1985) defends the need for a focus on 'gifted women' and 'eminence,' dismissing as 'inappropriate' the 'literature which glorifies women's ambivalence about success as a valid 'different voice' (Kerr, 1985:162). She questions the legitimacy of suggesting that gifted women are really making a 'choice', arguing instead that the 'choices' are in part illusory and also posing the question: 'What if gifted women are nice enough and smart enough to make do with whatever limits have been imposed upon them, and to defend their

lifestyle as being the product of their own free choice?’ (Kerr, 1985: 240).

Hershman (2005) also rejects the reality of the purported ‘choices’ being made by highly-able women and counters the charge of ‘individualism’ by arguing that:

If the ruling class is overwhelmingly male, the rulers will make decisions that benefit males, whether from ignorance or from indifference. Media surveys reveal that if only one member of a television show’s creative staff is female, the percentage of women on-screen goes up from 36 per cent to 42 per cent (Hershman, 2005).

In light of their differing views on the validity of discussing the continued dearth of eminent women, the literatures take differing stances on the degree to which the barriers to eminence are located ‘within’ or ‘without.’

2.3 Cultural and Social barriers to future eminence

2.3.1 The current picture of employment

Statistics and media reports continue to testify to the gender imbalance which exists at the top: ‘Only 18.3 per cent of the world’s members of parliament are women (UK figure is under 20 per cent)’ (Banyard, 2010: 2), ‘we currently have only 18% of FTSE 250 Board positions held by women’ (The Female FTSE Board Report, 2015), ‘A hundred and ninety heads of state; nine are women.... In the corporate sector, women at the top—C-level jobs, board seats—tops out at fifteen, sixteen per cent’ (Auletta, 2011). The Fawcett Society 2013 report ‘The Changing Labour Market: delivering for women, delivering for growth’ draws our attention back to the continued ‘pay gap’ for women: ‘Women’s wages are lower than men’s across the board in the private sector.’ (2013:10). Recent studies have also underlined the disturbingly slow rate of progress in this area: ‘the October 2014 report from the World

Economic Forum predicted that it will take until 2095 to achieve global gender equality in the workplace' (Symington-Mills, 2015).

2.3.2 The metaphors we use: Glass Ceilings, glass cliffs and labyrinths

In terms of attempting to explain this continued short fall, much of the literature resorts to metaphor to attempt to make sense of this puzzling picture. The plethora of metaphors used to describe the continued problems of gender inequality: 'glass ceilings' (Bryant, 1984), 'off ramps/on ramps' (Hewlett, 2007), 'labyrinths' (Eagly and Carli, 2007) and 'leaking pipelines' (PWC, 2008), continue to centre around imagery of barriers and blockages. It feels as though we struggle to find a means to explain the position of high-achieving women in our society; whereas, barring the metaphorical 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1992) employed to depict the ease with which men rise to senior positions, even in female-dominated industries e.g. nursing, we tend to have little difficulty in illustrating a male career path to the 'top.'

The 'glass ceiling' was a metaphor originally employed by Gay Bryant (1984) to describe the invisible barrier to women's progress in employment: 'Women have reached a certain point — I call it the glass ceiling. They're in the top of middle management and they're stopping and getting stuck' (Frenkiel, 1984). The term has been widely adopted and adapted to describe the, initially, invisible barriers to women's top-level achievement. In 2005, Ryan and Haslam extended the metaphor in order to capture the difficulties faced by women who have managed to break through the 'glass ceiling' only to face the 'glass cliff.' Their research focuses upon the phenomena of women being promoted into: 'risky, difficult jobs where the chances of failure are higher' and

provides a counter to the accusation that women being promoted to board-level positions leads to a downturn in company profits (Judge, 2003) by coming to the conclusion that: 'rather than women leaders causing poor company performance, poor company performance may lead to the appointment of women to positions of leadership' (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). They also cite the existence of 'glass cliff' experiences for female leaders in politics or law, giving Margaret Thatcher as an example of a leader who was 'allowed' power at a time when the country was in recession and burdened by many economic and social problems.

More recently, others have begun to reject the seeming 'simplicity' of the 'glass ceiling' metaphor as no longer being representative of women's reality. Notably, Eagli and Carly (2007) have suggested that, 'the glass ceiling metaphor is now more wrong than right' and argue that 'the metaphor implies that women and men have equal access to entry- and midlevel positions,' which Eagli and Carly suggest they do not. They also take issue with the suggestion that the 'invisibility' of the 'glass ceiling' implies that women are being deceived into thinking that no real barriers exist. Most powerfully, Eagli and Carly critique the simplicity of the image of a single barrier:

By depicting a single, unvarying obstacle, the glass ceiling fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership journeys. In truth, women are not turned away only as they reach the penultimate stage of a distinguished career. They disappear in various numbers at many points leading up to that stage (Eagli and Carli, 2007:3).

Instead of the 'glass ceiling' with which they take issue, Eagli and Carly argue

for an image which restores the complex reality faced by women and thus suggest the metaphor of a 'labyrinth':

As a contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead (Eagli and Carly, 2007:4).

So too, the metaphor of 'the mommy track' (Lewin, 1989) is a complication of the simplicity of 'the glass ceiling.' The 'mommy track' is the idea that there is an alternative 'path,' followed by women with careers who choose to have children. Felice Schwartz (1989) is credited as being the catalyst to 'the Mommy track' discussion. Schwartz rejects the 'glass ceiling' metaphor as 'misleading' and again suggests that greater complexity is needed:

The misleading metaphor of the glass ceiling suggests an invisible barrier constructed by corporate leaders to impede the upward mobility of women beyond the middle levels. A more appropriate metaphor, I believe, is the kind of cross-sectional diagram used in geology. The barriers to women's leadership occur when potentially counterproductive layers of influence on women — maternity, tradition, socialization — meet management strata pervaded by the largely unconscious preconceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of men. Such interfaces do not exist for men and tend to be impermeable for women (Schwartz, 1989).

While Schwartz focuses on the cost of employing women for employers, the Lewin article (1989) responds by highlighting the dangers in 'expanding the Mommy track in which women with family responsibilities are shunted into dead-end, lower-paying jobs.' While the metaphor of a 'track' implies a less prestigious path, it does not preclude the image of returning to the 'path' and continuing the journey; in this way the metaphor is once again extended and

developed almost a decade later in the midst of the 'Opt-Out' literature (Belkin, 2003) by Hewlett's (2007) 'Off-ramps and On-ramps.' In this metaphor, women are able to 'off-ramp' from the 'highway' of their career when they wish to have children or 'opt-out' and then choose to 'on-ramp', although as Hewlett identifies perhaps not as easily as they might wish, back into their career at a later date. The shift from 'glass ceiling' to 'off ramps and on ramps', whilst not discussing exactly the same scenario, does illustrate the shift in perception regarding the existence of social and cultural barriers to women's progression. The 'glass ceiling' of the 1980s was an image which connotes a barrier put in place by forces completely outside the control of the potentially 'eminent' woman; however, the 'opting-out' and 'off-ramps and on-ramps' which lead to exiting the career journey and potentially re-entering at a subsequent stage are metaphors which foreground the woman's agency: she is the one who will seemingly 'choose' to call a halt to her career. However, as I shall suggest with a number of these literatures we must continue to question to what extent this is a real choice and to what degree the external barriers dictated by social and cultural forces have merely been internalised by women.

2.3.3 The neuroscientific discourse

In the last decade or so, we have returned to science to explain the different career paths of men and women. While the neuroscientific discourse might initially suggest itself as a means of highlighting the internal and insurmountable 'biological' barriers to 'eminence', I am going to explore the set of literature which positions this emphasis on the purported findings of cognitive neuroscience (Fine, 2010; Jordan-Young, 2010) as part of an inhibiting social, cultural script for women's progress. A neuroscientific

discourse has come to be used as a powerful justification in all spheres of debate; nowhere has this been more so than with issues surrounding gender difference. Explaining a dearth of eminent women through recourse to physical and biological factors is not a new phenomenon and Brizendine (2006) reminds us that the differences in the size of the male and female brain were interpreted by scientists in the 19th Century as meaning, 'that women had less mental capacity than men' (2006: 1). Similarly, Fine (2010) draws our attention to Gisborne's 1797 book, 'An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex' in which he outlined the differences between the male and female mind, explaining that the female mind is less adept in focused application and reasoning. Fine draws a continuity between this explanation and that of Baron-Cohen in 'The Essential Difference' (2003). Baron-Cohen emphasises the 'systematising' tendency of the male brain, compared to the 'empathetic' tendencies of the female brain, concluding that, 'People with the female brain make the most wonderful counsellors, primary-school teachers, nurses...' (2003:185). Fine (2010) and Jordan-Young (2010) take issue with this approach and what Fine defines as the emergence of 'neuro-sexism,' which has allowed a retrogressive discourse to emerge, where inequalities can be justified with reference to deterministic arguments couched in the language of science: 'this kind of portrayal is just new 'advertising copy' for the old stereotype of females as submissive, emotional, oversensitive gossips. And a different, nicer way of saying that female brains are designed for feminine skills rather than those necessary for excellence in masculine pursuits' (2006:100). Jordan-Young (2010) critiques this 'simplification', finding that scientists, in her view, have failed to: 'even entertain the idea that the

structural difference might come from behaviour and experience rather than the other way around' (2010: xi).

Fine (2010) goes on to discuss the dangerous fetishisation of 'neuroscientific information.' She identifies that, 'we privilege it over boring, old-fashioned behavioral evidence. It brings a satisfying feel to empty scientific explanations. And it seems to tell us who we really are' (2010: 168). Jordan-Young (2010) elaborates on the seductive sway of neuroscientific justification, which draws its power partly from the fact that: 'It's hard for the average person to critically engage with a story that comes from the rarefied domain of cognitive neuroscience' (2010: 2). Perhaps resorting to a language of science also allows views to be forwarded under the guise of objectivity and neutrality, which would be deemed retrogressive or sexist. The dangers identified by Fine and Jordan-Young in using allusions to neuroscience to justify simplistic, limiting arguments of difference and determinism are exemplified in the writings of Hoff-Sommers (2000) and Moxon (2008). Hoff-Sommers references neuroanatomist Linda Allen and her findings of differences between male and female brains: 'Seven or eight of the ten structures we measured turned out to be different between men and women. One example is the corpus callosum, a thick bundle of nerves that connects the two hemispheres of the brain' (2000:89), but it is her own subsequent, conditional clause, 'perhaps allowing for a better connection between the two hemispheres' which exemplifies the mistaken tendency of reading, 'a simple one to one correspondence between brain regions and mental processes' (Fine, 2010: 152). This reasoning is obviously seductive in allowing society to think themselves 'off the hook' regarding the continued gender inequality in

eminent positions: we no longer have to feel that the lack of women in society's highest offices is a social injustice if we can explain it away through a discourse which resorts to innate biological gender difference at every turn.

The 'Neuro-sexist' discourse (Fine, 2010) is not only damaging in limiting the range of factors discussed in relation to women's careers and positioning in society and reducing debate to evolutionary, biological explanations (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Hoff-Sommers, 2000; Moxon, 2008; Brizendine, 2006; Pinker, 2008) but also as Fine (2010) identifies: 'the media reports of gender that emphasise biological factors leave us more inclined to agree with gender stereotypes, to self-stereotype ourselves and even for our performance to fall in line with those stereotypes' (2010: 172). Therefore highlighting the potential for a dominant cultural discourse of neuroscientific explanation to act as a potentially limiting barrier to female eminence.

2.3.4 The focus on boys

Just as the neuroscientific discourse has focused on explorations of gender difference, there has also been a renewed focus upon gender difference in educational settings with a particular focus upon the perceived educational underachievement of boys. The insistence of the media, and even of this study, in constructing gender as a simplistic binary opposition is of course to ignore the complexities which underpin achievement and under-achievement. Feminist thinking has long since recognised the fallacy in attempting to speak for 'women' as a single category and 'embraced intersectionality' which McCall (2005) defines as 'the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations' (McCall, 2005: 1771). Ethnicity,

class and other identity markers are inevitably part of a more realistically complex picture; however, the media, education system and society at large continue to reinforce an overly simplistic relationship between achievement and gender. It therefore remains important to explore the nature of the powerful discourses that seek to position and define 'girls' and 'boys' in relation to 'success' and 'failure', whilst recognising the narrowly dualistic depiction which is being constructed.

Francis and Skelton (2005) cite Griffin's (1998) identification of the 'moral panic among British journalists and policy makers concerning boys' educational achievement (2005: 2) with the concurrent concern among feminists that this 'over-estimate and consequent over-concern with boys' achievement' (2005: 2) will deflect attention and resources from girls' education, and result in, 'a massive neglect of girls in terms of resource allocation and policy and research concerns' Ringrose (2007: 473). The unquestioning acceptance of girls as education's 'unproblematic academic achievers' (Skelton et al. 2008: 189) is identified by Francis and Skelton (2005) as leading to a, 'lack of discussion of girls...an absence, a silent gap in the discourse' (2005: 104). This, then reveals the 'marginalisation of girls, how their school performance is seen as peripheral to that of boys' and ultimately, 'how they do not count' (2005: 104). This positioning of girls as successful and unproblematic means, again, that meaningful discussion relating to the best way to educate high ability girls is silenced and deemed unnecessary when juxtaposed against the hegemonic 'poor boys' discourse (Francis, 2006).

The literature which outlines the difficulties facing boys and young men (Kindlon et al; Pinker, 2008; Hoff-Sommers, 2000; Moxon, 2008) tends to focus on simplistic comparisons in educational attainment at school level with little regard for other issues of race or class. The literature also creates the sense that this is a new and dramatic 'crisis' for boys, rather than acknowledging, as Francis and Skelton (2005) do in their discussion of Cohen (1998), that a concern with boys' underachievement dates back to John Locke and rather than beginning in the late 1980s, 'more girls than boys actually gained five or more exam passes at age 16 in the 1970s and 1980s. It was simply that, prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum, girls' success tended to be in the 'wrong' subjects (e.g. arts, domestic science etc.) meaning that their achievements were rarely noticed or valued' (2005: 6). The characterisation of the current situation as a 'crisis' for boys' achievement also leads to accusatory discussion of the 'feminisation of assessment methods' (2005: 103) including a discursive positioning of, 'sudden death tests...as masculine and academic (conflating the two), in opposition to coursework which is positioned as gentle, easy, nebulous, mediocre, not properly academic and feminine' (2005: 104). All of which not only, 'unsobly blames females for boys' apparent underperformance' (ibid: 104) but also undermines and devalues the academic success being experienced by girls.

Interestingly, the focus of much of the 'boys'/male' crisis' literature does not look beyond the discrepancy in achievement between girls and boys at an educational level. Indeed, it is, as Francis and Skelton (2005) identify, assumed that, 'boys' underperformance at GCSE exams in Britain in comparison with girls is having a detrimental impact on their employment on

leaving school, and on their subsequent life-chances. But actually research shows that young men continue to be better paid in the work force, where the gender pay gap remains (Stafford et al., 1999, cited in Francis and Skelton, 2005: 7; Equal Pay Portal, 2014) and continue, as outlined in the literature review of 'Eminent women', to greatly outnumber women in the top jobs in almost every field.

2.3.5 The 'Successful Girls' discourse

In England, the examination success of girls has been documented annually in the press. In 2013, 24.8 per cent of girls' GCSE papers were graded at A or A* compared to 17.6 per cent of those awarded to boys. The same can be said for the number of girls gaining grade C or above passes, with 72.3 per cent of girls achieving the grade compared to 63.7 per cent of boys. In my own subjects of English and English Literature, girls' success was even more pronounced with 82.7 per cent of girls gaining the best grades compared to 70.1% of boys (DfE, 2013). At A-level the headlines have been similar in the past decade; however, 2013 saw an increase in boys' achievement at the highest level where boys were marginally more likely to gain an A* grade at A level: 'boys were 0.5% more likely to get the top grade' (Chalabi, 2013). In light of their educational achievement at GCSE and A-level, a dominant discourse which positions girls as 'successful' has arisen: 'Girls surge ahead at 16 to open up record gender gap' (Shepherd, 2011); 'Girls think they are cleverer than boys from age 4' (Shepherd, 2010); 'Why do girls get better results?' (Berliner, 2008).

Counter-intuitive as it may seem, the popular discourse, which celebrates 'successful girls', can be seen as another cultural barrier to increasing the number of eminent women. Pomerantz and Raby (2011) discuss the rhetoric of 'supergirls' and 'girl power' which they characterise as perpetuating, 'the post-feminist notion that girls' power is achieved through personal efforts and unlimited choices' (2011: 550). The accepted view that girls are the success story of neo-liberal educational choice, mean that they are 'offered as powerful evidence that girls today are unimpeded by structural constraints, particularly gender inequality,' (Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005; Harris, 2004 cited in Pomerantz and Raby, 2011: 550). This 'post-feminist' argument means that girls and women are characterised as no longer having a use or desire for feminism (McRobbie, 2004, 2009 cited in Pomerantz and Raby, 2011). The result of this is an increasing tendency to 'individualise' the difficulties faced by women aiming for eminent positions, rather than interrogating wider, systemic and societal barriers, which Ringrose (2007), Pomerantz and Raby (2011) and Walkerdine (2001) see as part of a broader neo-liberal discourse which limits discussion of the difficulties facing girls and women and marks a transfer of 'fault' to the individual. The celebratory rhetoric of 'successful girls' perhaps masks and suppresses the need for a discussion centring on the more complex issues of identity and achievement, which arise for girls as they move beyond the 'credentialed' world of formal education.

2.3.6 Post-feminism and feminism under fire

Ringrose (2007) and Skelton (2010) both see various types of feminism as culpable in the creation of the over-simplified, 'binary, oppositional framing' Ringrose (2007: 480), which characterises the discussion of gender, education

and achievement. Skelton (2010) discusses the history of feminist thinking in educational policy, identifying that the British government was reluctant to ensure equal opportunities in schools, but was subsequently forced, as a result of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, to adopt, 'a liberal feminist position to inform its guidelines (DES 1976; EOC 1984)' (Skelton, 2010:132). She goes on to explain the correlation between Liberal feminism with its emphasis on individualism and choice and the tenets of Neoliberal government policy contexts. Ringrose (2007), in response to McRobbie (2004) elaborates the consequences of this connection. She considers 'Liberal feminism' to have 'contributed to a vicious rhetorical cycle of 'girls' victimisation vs boys' victimisation' in educational debates' (Jackson, 1998, cited in Ringrose, 2007: 473) and sees the narrow, dualistic thinking inherent in Liberal feminism as leading directly to, 'narrow measures of performance by gender difference, now used by the government to 'prove' high pupil achievement for girls, school effectiveness and gender equality more generally' (Ringrose, 2007: 473). According to this view, Liberal feminist discourse has supported an oversimplification which ignores the complex intersectionalities of race and class; allows the category of 'girls' to be lauded as an educational success story and ignores the incommensurable factors which may not render 'girls' such unproblematic achievers.

As evidenced in the discussion of 'boys' underachievement', a movement towards 'Post-feminist' thinking is also having a negative impact upon any discussion of female eminence. Popular media portrayals of boys and men as suffering as a result of feminised systems and practices; Moxon's (2008) summary that 'Women are universally and perennially privileged: over-

privileged' (2008: 3); or Hoff Sommers' 'The War against boys (how misguided feminism is harming our young men)' (2000) all exemplify post-feminist thought. This line of thinking involves a rejection of the continued need for feminist thinking and campaign; Hoff Sommers (2000) characterises a concern with the welfare and well-being of girls as 'crisis mongering' (2000: 213) and hyperbole. She is doubtful about the work of the 'girl advocates' (ibid: 31) and the 'myth of the fragile girl' (ibid:17) and she too resorts to the 'neuroscientific' difference discourse, as critiqued by Fine (2010) and Jordan-Young (2010) to support her own hyperbolic conclusion that, 'If we continue on our present course, boys will indeed, be tomorrow's second sex' (Jordan-Young, 2010: 213). Ringrose (2007) defines 'Post-feminism' as, 'complex representational terrain, temporal, theoretical (etc.) where *both* backlash and destabilisation result' (2007:477). Interestingly, she sees this way of thinking as resulting in part from the 'gender dichotomous logic' (ibid: 477) exemplified by Liberal feminist thinking. Clearly, this narrative does not allow space for an exploration of continued inequalities for women attaining eminent status; the discourse carries within itself the inherent accusation that to continue to explore issues relating to women's achievement and eminence would somehow be to further selfishly 'damage' and diminish the status of men. Thus, an invisible barrier precluding intelligent debate surrounding women's absence from positions of eminence is imposed and culturally enforced.

2.3.7 Education and the economy

Another discourse which might be said to limit our ability to explore the complexities of gendered success could be our 'performative' educational rhetoric (Ball, 1999). Although validating the examination success of high-

achieving girls, it also functions as an invisible barrier to real debate regarding future eminence. Ball (1999) discusses the 'increasing subordination of education to 'the economic' (1999: 198) and the 'cultivation of enterprising subjects' (ibid: 198) as its primary aim. The onus from this 'human-capital' positioning is not to interrogate the part of the system, e.g. girls' education, which seems to be producing measurable success and a reliable source of adaptable, flexible employees. Renold et al. (2006) present our current regime of testing, where 'high educational achievement is only ever represented positively' and 'enjoyment' and 'raising standards' are unproblematically fused together, while 'stress, fear and anxiety' are silenced (2006: 457). This system perhaps does not allow, or encourage, us to question issues of identity and development towards longer-term, fulfilling career aims, which might disrupt the surface of 'such one-dimensional celebratory discourse' (2006: 458). In a regime where all must 'be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear' (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv), we seem happy to celebrate the measurable examination outcomes for high-ability girls and to simultaneously ignore the subsequent short-fall in women taking up eminent positions longer term.

2.3.8 Women in the workplace

We have also been content to celebrate the growing numbers of women in the workplace as a testament to an increasingly egalitarian society, with the expectation that women will adapt themselves to the workplaces in which they find themselves. Wellington (2001) and Wirth (2001) both argue that the current workplace set up, devised by and based upon the needs of men, represents a barrier to women's eminence. Wirth highlights the out-dated,

‘organisational structures, policies and procedures, often unconsciously based on socially constructed ‘masculine’ attributes’ (2001: 130), particularly with reference to practices which impinge on the boundary between the work and personal sphere, which tend to have a particularly detrimental impact on women with child-care responsibilities. Similarly, Wellington (2001) reiterates that the workplace was originally designed by men to ‘fit their own needs’ and classifies changes that are beginning to take place as a ‘slow evolution, not revolution towards gender blindness’ (2001: 14). Wellington also foregrounds the paucity of mentors for women as a key factor in the workplace, ‘the single most important reason why – among the equally talented – men tend to rise higher than women is that most men have mentors and most women do not’ (2001: 3). When considering all of these workplace barriers, it seems relevant to remember that the young women entering these environments have been conditioned by their neo-liberal education to view themselves as agents whose success is based upon their individual ability to adapt, overcome and succeed and not to look at potential difficulties experienced in the workplace as the result of system-wide, or social failings. The current generation of young people is unlikely to take up Judith Rodin’s (President of University of Pennsylvania) instruction not to ask: ‘What’s wrong with me but what’s wrong with the system...? Most problems are systemic, and you need to analyse them dispassionately’ (2001: 229).

The ‘Opt-Out’ literature, a trend outlined by Lisa Belkin (2003) in the New York Times, centres around the stories of women who, having ostensibly overcome workplace inequalities and constructed successful careers, subsequently ‘step out’ of these careers, usually, but not always, following child birth. In ‘Opting

Out – Why women really quit their careers and head home’, Pamela Stone (2007) examines the lives of highly able women who have ‘opted out’ of the work force and raises questions about the extent to which this is a ‘choice’ for these women. She explores the extent to which the expectations and structure of the workplace, coupled with continued expectation regarding a woman’s role in raising children, made the reality of their options limited. In ‘Off Ramps and On Ramps’, (2007) Hewlett takes a more optimistic look at the women who ‘opt out,’ or in her parlance, ‘off ramp’, and suggests a move towards increased flexibility and respect for women’s non-linear career paths. The distinctive turn within the ‘opt out’ literature is that women’s career success or otherwise is depicted as largely within their own control and as their own ‘choice.’ Stone (2007) found the women that she spoke to regarding their ‘opting out’ of successful careers in order to stay at home with children were adamant that this was their ‘choice’ and they were ‘lucky’ to have been able to make it. This rhetoric is in line with the tenets of ‘Choice feminism’ (Hershman, 2005) and exemplified in Pinker’s ‘The Sexual Paradox.’ (2008) However, others have reacted against this insistence that all career decisions are now the result of ‘choice’ rather than inequality and a recent backlash of literature has emerged to counter the ‘choice feminism’ arguments of Pinker etc. Banyard (2010), Walter (2010), Hershman (2005) and Fine (2010) call for a return to an emphasis upon ‘equity feminism.’ ‘Equity feminism’ recalls the origins of the feminist endeavour with an emphasis upon women continuing to push for equal representation at the highest levels, rather than seeing the absence of women from the boardroom or political realm as a ‘choice.’

Most recently, the New York Times and the Huffington Post have revisited the subject of 'opting out.' Judith Warner (2013) returned to the original group of women who were part of Belkin's (2003) New York Times piece 10 years on. The piece is entitled, 'The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In' and chronicles the women's stories as they attempt to re-join the workforce. The article also explores the way the high-achieving women have used their time outside the workforce e.g. often quite intensive charity work, involvement in children's schooling etc. Warner sets these women's personal narratives against a changing landscape of public opinion in the US following the recession. She cites the research from the General Social Survey in 2000 where 40 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'a mother's working is harmful to her children', in comparison to a survey in 2010 by which point, 'a record 40% of mothers were functioning as family bread winners' and found that 75 per cent of Americans now agreed with the statement that, 'a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work' (Warner, 2013). The suggestion in Warner's re-examination of these women's choices is that there were cultural influences at work in their original 'choices' to 'opt-out' and the discourses of 'intensive mothering' by which they were surrounded.

2.3.9 Normative gender roles

This final suggestion by Warner is an important one in highlighting the potentially limiting influence that the internalisation of accepted gender-normative roles can have. Brown et al. (2010) explore gender differences in career choice and achievement with reference to 'Social role theory.' With reference to this perspective, they respond to the question of why men and

women continue to occupy gender-normative roles with the idea that, 'women and men's ideas about what is appropriate for their own gender emerge from their internalisation of the current social structure in which women are more likely to be responsible for caregiving and men are more likely to be responsible for providing' (2010: 569). This perspective also elaborates the 'disciplining' nature of such gendered expectations on career aspiration: 'there are rewards for role congruity and punishments for role incongruity' (Diekmann and Eagly, 2008, cited in Brown et al. 2010: 569). There is still, therefore, a positive bias towards women when they occupy the role of caregiver and a lingering media attachment to the value of 'intensive mothering.' This narrative of motherhood continues to position a 'good mother' as one who 'stays at home with young children' (Gorman and Fritzsche, 2002, cited in Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011: 84) and a working mother of young children continues to be viewed as, 'less communal and more selfish' (Bridges and Etaugh, 1995, cited in Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011: 84). It is also worth noting here however, that part of a woman's difficulty in adopting a socially 'congruent' role is the contradictory and conflicted discourse, which continues to proliferate any discussion of women's working lives and mothering experiences: '*Working Mothers Bad for Children*' (The Guardian, 2003); *Children of Working Mothers Lag Behind* (Daily Mail, 2014); *At last, working mothers can ditch their guilt – their children do not suffer* (The Guardian, 2013).

The findings of Greene and Debacker's (2004) possible selves study reiterate the conclusion that, 'sociocultural factors, such as sex role prescriptions and other norms' (2004:115) matter and exert significant influence over 'people's representations of themselves in the future' (ibid: 109). Their findings showed

that men and women's perceptions of their possible future selves reflected the 'sex role stereotypes that predominated at the time and place the research was conducted' (ibid: 115). In terms of leadership, women are woefully disserved by sex-role assumptions, as evidenced by Eagly and Carli (2007). The report recounts that when engaged in meetings at a global retail company, 'People often had to speak up to defend their turf, but when women did so, they were vilified. They were labelled 'control freaks'; men acting the same way were called passionate' (2010: 86). This negative reaction to behaviour which is deemed incongruent with stereotypical sex roles, means that women are routinely 'punished' for engaging in precisely the behaviours, 'negotiating, influencing, and self-promotion' (ibid: 86) which frequently underpin 'successful' leadership. Similarly, Huffington (2006) cites the importance of the 'famous psychological assessment tool developed in the 1970s called the Bem Sex Role Inventory' (2006: 91). The participants in the experiment were asked to list 'desirable adjectives for men and women,' and the 'male traits were all about being assertive dominant, independent, and decisive' whereas the traits for women were, 'all about relationships: loyal, compassionate, warm, cheerful, soft-spoken.' Although this study is now 40 years old, it is not difficult to see the continuities in the recent and on-going discussion regarding the use of 'bossy' to describe girls. Sheryl Sandberg discusses the gendered use of 'bossy' in 'Lean In' (2013) and has since launched a campaign, alongside Beyonce and Condoleezza Rice, with the Girl Scouts of America to 'ban bossy.' This attention to language reminds us of the onslaught which girls continue to face regarding behavioural expectations of their gender. It also gives us a stronger understanding of why girls might

remain sensitive towards the potential social punishment in 'being target of a threatening upward comparison' (Exline et al., 2004: 121).

Faced with the challenges of overcoming social and cultural expectations regarding gendered roles and behaviours, it seems that while women have been 'gradually broadening' their study and occupational choices, despite the social difficulties encountered, Wirth (2001) draws attention to the fact that, 'there seems, however, to be little indication of a parallel movement for men. Though they have always had a wider choice few are moving into subject areas traditionally regarded as female' (2001: 83). Without a reciprocal movement away from 'traditional' roles by both men and women, it becomes difficult to envisage how the power of 'social role theory' will lessen in the force it exerts upon career aspiration and workplace behaviour.

2.4 Internal barriers to eminence

2.4.1 High Achievement and problematic mental health

As many of the overt barriers to women's equal opportunities in employment have been overcome, the problem has been to explain women's continued absence from 'top jobs' in anything approaching equal numbers. Many have sought explanations which focus on the 'internal' barriers to women's eminence (Bell, 1989; Dai, 2002; Horner, 1972; Dowling, 1981; Clance and Imes, 1978; Verdonk et. al., 2010). Here I will explore the dominant threads in the literature, which seek to explain the internal 'difficulties' faced by high-achieving women, whilst seeking to question some of the underlying assumptions of female fragility being overtly or implicitly posited.

There is a familiarity in reading about the intertwined experiences of high achievement and problematic mental health (Meyer et al. 2011; Marano, 2007; Simonton, 2005; Jamison, 1993). Whilst the cultural script for men involves 'genius' and 'brilliance' coupled with a heroic struggle with 'inner demons' and a 'tortured soul' echoing the lives of the romantic poets: Keats, Byron etc. The female experience is more likely to fall somewhere on the binary between 'vulnerable', 'over-emotional', 'hysteric' (exemplified in Cameron's 'Calm down dear' directed to Angela Eagle in the House of Commons, 2011) to 'manic', and 'dangerous' 'mad woman in the attic' with the fearful 'ambition' of Lady Macbeth standing as a warning to all. Although the language we currently use in discussing women's mental health, 'burn out', 'exhaustion', 'workaholic', 'perfectionist', 'depressive' might be less extreme, it is important to recognise it as part of the same historical positioning of the 'female' (Appignanesi, 2008).

As outlined in Appignanesi's (2008) comprehensive history 'Mad, Bad, Sad: A history of women and the mind doctors from 1800 to the present', there is a strong precedent for the cultural script which links 'female' and 'madness' in various guises: 'There are those which retrospectively divulge the various threads that go into the thinking of their time and so exemplify a condition....for example, Mary Lamb, Alice James, Celia Brandon, Sylvia Plath and Marilyn Monroe' (Appignanesi, 2008: 9). Despite, or perhaps because of, the number of women who have demonstrated their abilities to lead and work at the top of their field, as Meyer et al., (2011) suggests 'popular culture remains unable to imagine femininity absent of vulnerability' (Stabile, 2009, cited in Meyer et al.: 227).

The dangers of 'perfectionism', 'workaholism,' burnout and anxiety continue to dominate the literature relating to women's success and achievement (Kay and Shipman, 2014; Mitchelson and Burns, 1998; Kasen et. al., 2005). The cultural script which links fragility with female high-achievement has a long historical precedent, as discussed by Jackson et al., (2010) 'Gendered views of what girls can or cannot do closely mirror historical, essentialist perspectives of males and females with regard to over-strain, over-conscientiousness and potential' (2010: 46). In part this is the result of the persistent perception that girls' success is the result of their 'hard work', which is 'seen as finite and limited' rather than their natural brilliance (ibid: 46). Landrum (1993, 1994) exemplifies this line of thinking in his two books: 'Profiles of Genius' and 'Profiles of Female Genius.' Landrum profiles a range of male and female high-achievers, identifying a set of characteristics for 'female genius' and 'male genius.' While he identifies the traits of 'male genius' as, amongst others: 'Rebellious, risk-taking, persuasive, passionate, charismatic, competitive, confident, focused, impatient and driven' (1993). He identifies the female traits as including: 'impatient overachiever, perpetual perfectionist, Type A Workaholic' and perhaps most arrestingly, 'psychosexually driven' (1994). Whilst Landrum's position might demonstrate a particularly extreme version of this kind of thinking, the sense that female high-achievers have finite potential and need to be protected from themselves, is a prevalent one (Carey, 2011; Faw, 2011).

2.4.2 The ‘Girls in Crisis’ literature

The American literature of the 1980s and 1990s in this field: Pipher (1994), Kerr (1985), Noble et al. (1999) provides an exploration of the perceived ‘crisis’ in identity and achievement experienced by the gifted girl in adolescence. This literature comes from a psychological positioning and suggests a range of difficulties, including a lowering of self-confidence in academic ability (Kerr, 1985); a systematic devaluing of accomplishments and discounting of potential (Noble et al., 1999) and a struggle for ‘authenticity.’ (Pipher, 1994) Meyer et al. (2011) has subsequently problematised elements of this discourse which he characterises as ‘a moral panic over girls’ behavior’ exemplified by Pipher’s ‘Reviving Ophelia’ (1994) and Wiseman’s ‘Queen Bees and Wannabes’ (2009). Meyer suggests that: ‘ultimately, this “girls in crisis” narrative is a cultural discourse concerned with gender and madness, particularly influenced by mediated messages about femininity’ (Meyer et al. 2011: 217).

The literature outlines a range of thinking patterns, ‘syndromes’ or ‘complexes’ either unique to high-ability girls/women or predominantly experienced by them. Martina Horner (1972) found in her research that ‘women characteristically under achieved when competing against men. Despite exceptional ability, women would perform decidedly below their skills and, curiously would usually be unable to explain why’ (Horner, 1972, cited in Kerr, 1985: 163). This tendency came to be called ‘The Horner Effect’ and subsequently the ‘Fear of Success Syndrome.’ In terms of the application of this ‘fear of success’ to the lives of gifted girls and women, Kerr (1985) concludes that: ‘since they are astute, gifted girls become sensitive to the

conflicts for women in competitive situations much earlier than average girls do' (1985:163). She also cites further exemplification from Terman's (1956) studies which showed that, 'gifted girls and women have an even stronger need to please others than average women do' (1985:164). In the language chosen to describe this phenomena: 'syndrome', 'effect,' the gifted girl is pathologised: the narrative of her fragility means she falls 'victim'. This positioning obscures the fact that this scenario revolves around others reacting to the gifted girl as a threat, to which she, intelligently, if in self-limiting manner, responds and adapts. Instead of viewing the gifted girl's response to being perceived as a threat as a failing or 'syndrome', we might more helpfully turn towards re-shaping the attitudes of those who persist in responding to the gifted girl as 'threatening', whether overtly or implicitly. Perhaps this is a further instance where we are keen to re-position a social problem as an individual flaw.

In 1981 Colette Dowling coined, 'The Cinderella Complex' which she saw as being connected to 'The Horner Effect' in sharing the 'fear of success' but also adding, 'the desire to be cared for' (Kerr, 1985:164). Kerr elaborates her definition of 'The Cinderella Complex' as:

A network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that detain women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives. Women caught in the Cinderella Complex are 'too angry to stay behind and too frightened to move ahead' (Kerr, 1985:164).

This description, and the suggestion by Dowling that women who identify as 'Cinderella Complex' sufferers should pursue 'self-exploration' and potentially 'psychotherapy' can no doubt be helpful; however, it also reiterates a tendency in the literature to turn towards the individual as the sole site for improvement, at the expense of a wider social awareness.

Finally, and perhaps the psychological tendency which continues to hold the most relevance, Clance and Imes' (1978) research focused on 'The Imposter Phenomenon.' This phenomenon is experienced by highly able women, who 'despite significant successes and measurable accomplishments,' continue to believe that they have merely 'fooled everyone' (Kerr, 1985: 166). A part of the pattern of thinking associated with 'The Imposter Phenomenon' is the tendency to 'avoid any display of confidence in her abilities' as she suspects that, 'if she truly believes in her own intelligence and shows it, she will be rejected by others and will be forced into a lonely life without being nurtured by others' (Kerr, 1985:167). Certainly, from the position of the psychological literature on the experiences of the gifted girl/woman, it is easy to imagine the impact that this pattern of thinking could have upon a woman aspiring to an eminent position.

Some of the concerns of these earlier literatures can now be seen as characteristic of a different cultural era (Horner Effect, 1969; Cinderella Complex, 1981) prior to the enforcement of equal opportunity law or the effective implementation of the 'Sex Discrimination Act' (1975) legislation. Similarly, some of the concerns outlined in the American literature in relation to girls' declining academic achievement during adolescence (Kerr, 1985; Pipher,

1994) are of less relevance in the UK, given the academic achievement of girls at GCSE and A-Level (Freeman, 2010). Kay and Shipman (2014) continue to identify a lack of confidence as fundamental to women's continued absence from 'top jobs': 'Success, it turns out, correlates just as closely with confidence as it does with competence. No wonder that women, despite all our progress, are still woefully underrepresented at the highest levels' (Kay and Shipman, 2014). They invoke both neuroscience and the suggestion that women suffer from a greater risk of judgement and social exclusion if seen to be powerful or assertive. However, perhaps it is also interesting to note here that this 'lack of confidence' is once again foregrounded as a 'lack', which individual women must address within themselves. We might also question our cultural 'fetishisation' of confidence and tolerance of hubris, to the exclusion of other traits, e.g. humility (Smith, 2006). If seen as part of a cultural script which privileges a certain kind of risk-taking confidence, we might make visible a further social barrier which dictates the behaviour and attributes, with a male precedent, which it takes to be 'successful.'

A further thread running through the literature pertains to the effects of 'doing gender' on women's well-being and achievement. Kerr (1985) and Noble et al. (1999) echo the traditional feminist concerns of De Beauvoir (1949), Friedan (1963) and Greer (1970) regarding the problem of women's social construction as 'nice girls' and the 'loss of voice' faced by girls as they learn to perform their 'femininity.' Kerr (1985), Noble et al. (1999) and Pipher (1994) make a positive case for 'androgynous' traits and the 'golden age' of the pre-pubescent gifted girl who tends to score highly on androgyny. This exploration is important in giving a signpost towards the idea that before 'girls' become

sufficiently 'adept' at 'performing' their gender, they tend to share far more similarities with their male counterparts. Therefore, this seems to justify the conclusion that difference in future aspiration and useful character development are socialised rather than biological. This is echoed by Saunders and Kashubeck-West's (2006) research, which found a positive correlation between young women who scored highly on 'androgyny' and subjective well-being. This points towards the difficulties for high-achieving girls who are 'treading the careful line between 'doing girl' and 'doing success' (Skelton et al., 2008:189).

2.4.3 The impossibility of a unitary self

In a line of continuity from the American 1980's 'Girls in Crisis' literature of Pipher et al., contemporary discussion of British girls' achievement and identity continues to identify the dangers of inauthenticity and the difficulties in establishing a unitary sense of self. However, unlike the 'Girls in Crisis' literature, Francis et al. (2009, 2011); Walkerdine (2003); Renold et al. (2006) and Gavin et al. (2007) recognise the illusory goal that is the establishment of a fixed, unified 'self' across varying contexts. This set of literature draws upon Butler's (1990) argument that: 'one is not born with a fixed sense of self- rather, this conception is socially constructed sometime after birth' (Butler, 1990, cited in Francis et al., 2010: 171). Therefore, we begin to understand the difficulties for a high-achieving girl and subsequently an 'eminent' woman, as their sense of self and identity needs to be: 'validated by others to be successful, and not every possibility is discursively regarded as valid' (Francis et al., 2010:172). The literature suggests that this becomes increasingly

complex when we begin to interrogate the notion of maintaining a socially acceptable 'feminine' identity when, 'a growing body of feminist work has highlighted multiple ways in which discourses of femininity are inherently contradictory' (ibid: 172).

In 'Women of Vision' (2007), Gavin et al. begin by tracing the contradictory discourse of femininity back to 'two icons of 20th Century women...Rosie the Riveter and Barbie' (2007:1) whom they see as embodying some of the tensions of modern womanhood and exemplifying the puzzling developments in images of femininity: 'How could the real life Rosies of one era have so effectively challenged restrictive female stereotypes, only to be succeeded in ensuing years by a market for seemingly retrogressive female imagery?' (ibid:1). The text goes on to analyse the original imagery of Rosie the Riveter and finds within it, both the 'woman empowered by the appropriation of a male physique' but also the 'well made-up features and a few well-shaped curls' of femininity (ibid: 1). This example seems to capture our paradoxical attitudes towards female identity: progress, followed by fear and a return to hyper-femininity; a pattern, which continues to hold sway over our notions of 'acceptable femininity.'

In their research into the 'simultaneous production of educational achievement and popularity', Francis et al. (2009) illustrate that the 'balance' of identities needed to make 'Rosie the Riveter' an acceptable female subject, is still the case for high-achieving girls attempting to be socially accepted. Francis et al. (2009) use McRobbie's (2007) idea of the 'contemporary social contract' for girls which involves a 'post-feminist masquerade, wherein young women must

perform hyper-femininity and submissiveness if they are to simultaneously take up traditionally masculine aspects of performance that denote 'success' in education and career' (McRobbie, 2007, cited in Francis et al. 2009:10). Renold et al. (2006) illustrate this precarious balancing act in their research into high-achieving girls in the primary school classroom. The girls in Renold et al's study carefully negotiated the 'competing demands of changing modes of femininity and achievement,' (2006: 470) and had to find 'acceptable ways of performing 'clever' (a traditionally masculine subject position)' (ibid: 467). In the example of Shamilla's story her 'academic identity as a 'high achiever' is produced through 'discourses of 'lack' (in which success is silenced) to minimise any threat that her subject position might pose to other boys, her girl friendships and, ultimately, her 'femininity' (ibid: 469). In the broader sphere, Ringrose (2007) explores a similar tendency towards contradiction in the media's 'proliferation of post-feminist stories, images, and representations of the newly successful girl' which she cites as 'both wildly celebratory and deeply anxiety ridden' (2007: 482).

From this set of psychological literature, we can perhaps begin to understand the difficulties inherent in a high-ability girl's construction of a 'coherent', 'authentic' sense of self. While the difficulties entailed in such a self-construction may well manifest as individual mental health concerns: anxiety, depression, lack of confidence, 'Imposter Syndrome' (1978), as evidenced by the literature, we begin to see these individualised difficulties as an outward manifestation of the subject's attempt to internalise the contradictory, social discourse relating to femininity and success: 'the contradiction between positions, possible identities, identification...is experienced as great pain and

anxiety for the subject as it is lived as the failure to become the desired singular subjectivity' (Bauman, 2001, cited in Walkerdine, 2003: 247).

2.4.4 Neo-liberalism and its impact

When faced with the continued paradox of girls' educational success and relative absence from eminent positions, much of the literature is keen to emphasise the importance of certain characteristics and attributes for positions of future success and leadership. Navan (2009), Babcock and Laschever (2008), Rimm (1999, 2001) and Landrum (1994) all describe the various 'qualities' needed for the high-achieving girl to succeed. Rimm (2001) for instance cites the importance of 'overcoming obstacles' with references to 'resilience' and 'perseverance', which is echoed by Navan (2009). Rimm (2001) also advises girls and women to, 'expect to struggle psychologically' and that 'successful women struggled and sacrificed to balance their roles' (2001:18). British secondary schools have reacted in a similar way to the authors of this literature with an increased focus upon 'Personal Learning and Thinking Skills' (QCDA, 2009) and the development of the secondary SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) materials (2007), which draw upon a cognitive behavioural therapy approach in order to help students, 'beat the blues' or 'identify their feelings.' The message from these resources, and the literature, is clear: as an individual, you, and your attributes and management of emotions, are responsible for your success or failure, educationally and beyond.

This individualisation of an issue, which could be deemed a societal problem, e.g. lack of eminent women, is characterised as a product of our Neo-liberal

state by Francis (2006); Walkerdine (2003); Ringrose (2007) and Bauman (2008). Francis (2006) defines the neo-liberal position: 'It is the duty of the individual to be sufficiently flexible to maximise the opportunities available to her/him, and any failure resides in the individual rather than in the socio-economic structures' (2006:8). There is a clear connection between this idea and the potential perceptions of high-ability girls regarding future eminence: we might imagine that schooled in this line of thought, they will see women's, and perhaps in the future their own, lack of progression to eminent positions, as the result of individual flaws and failings. In this vein, Walkerdine (2003) gives an example of an over-worked secretary who feels 'totally responsible for her own destiny' and understands the necessity for the worker's 'self-management' in order to 'produce themselves,' so therefore never refers to 'exploitation' which becomes a 'suppressed discourse'; instead, the secretary readily takes ownership of her 'own failings' (2003: 240).

Bauman (2008) and Pomerantz and Raby (2011) clearly imply the potentially damaging impact of this line of thinking on the individual and their well-being. Pomerantz and Raby (2011) make reference to Harris' (2004) analysis of 'girls offered up as evidence that structural constraints are no longer relevant within educational debates,' with the understanding that girls have 'the ability to pull themselves – and their grades up by their bootstraps,' but also the dangers inherent in, 'the corollary that if girls fail to succeed, it is their fault alone' (Harris, 2004, cited in Pomerantz and Raby, 2011: 554). Looking ahead to women's working lives, we can clearly understand the implication that, like the aforementioned secretary, inequalities, structural difficulties and damaging practices will be personalised and internalised, 'rather than collectively

challenged as institutional acts of oppression' (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011: 561). Bauman (2008) extends the discussion of the potential impact of this 'person-focused ideology' and mistaken conflation of the social and cultural with the individual and personal: 'That turn of events is perceived and 'made sense of' by the same ideology of privatisation as a *personal* snub, a personally aimed (even if randomly targeted) humiliation; its first casualties are self-respect and the sentiments of security and self-confidence' (Bauman, 2008: 91). This argument points us towards an understanding which goes beyond the simplistic attribution of 'blame' to women's 'inner' barriers to eminence. Perhaps we begin to see the oft-mentioned depression, anxiety and eating disorders associated with the female as the inevitable result of anger turned 'inwards', in a system which encourages the individual ownership of progress and success, or its lack, at all costs.

2.5 Possible selves literature

Coming from a psychological perspective, Markus and Nurius (1986) refer to 'possible selves as 'the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become and the selves we are afraid of becoming' (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954), built upon the principle that, 'the self-concept acts as a filter or lens for viewing the world and is essential to people's construction and negotiation of their future and present world' (Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007:85). The focus of this project upon 'perceptions' has made the 'possible selves' literature particularly apt in the development of an appropriate design frame.

The literature which I have primarily focused upon in this field, discusses: 'work possible selves' in terms of gender (Pisarik and Shoffner, 2009; Brown et al., 2010; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007; Lips, 2004); 'family selves', relationships, (Brown et al., 2010; Greene and Debacker, 2004; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007) and expectations of future equality, (Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007). I have also looked at Leondari et al. (1998) on the differences between girls' and boys' 'possible selves' with reference to failure and feared possibilities (Pisarik and Shoffner, 2009; Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006). Finally, Zannettino (2008), and Walkerdine (1997) explore girls' construction of future self with reference to the 'complex relationship between girls' interactions with texts and the construction of their gendered identities' (Zannettino, 2008: 465).

2.5.1 Work possible selves

In terms of the basic creation of 'career' possible selves, Curry and colleagues (1994) cited in Oyserman and Fryberg, 2006:

Found that highly academically successful girls were significantly less likely to form career-oriented possible selves than boys. Instead, girls were more likely to imagine a future either at home raising children or a career based not on ability but on balancing home and some sort of job (2006: 21).

This sense of being aware of the potentially multiple demands on the time of a girl's future 'possible self' is also apparent in Fetterolf and Eagly (2007). They found that women expected future inequality in terms of fewer working hours, smaller salaries and more housework. Interestingly, Greene and Debacker (2004) found that men tended to envisage their future selves further into the future and to imagine a more even distribution of events and goal fulfilment

across their lifetime. Men also envisaged the pursuit of fewer future goals. The opposite was true for women and Greene and Debacker (2004) suggest the negative implications of this on women's future well-being: to achieve multiple wide ranging goals within a short time period is perhaps a stress-inducing prospect. Perhaps there is some sense of mirroring the cultural script for women in terms of 'multi-tasking' or 'having it all' here, making the pursuit of multiple goals more an implicit expectation than choice. A conflict in terms of future well-being also arises in Fetterolf and Eagly's findings (2007). Female participants viewed selves more positively and expected greater well-being if employed full time or part time compared to no employment; this is problematic when we consider the well-being of the 'Opt-Out' women (Belkin, 2003; Stone, 2007) who give up employment and return home.

More encouragingly Segal et al. (2001) conducted a study which found that although female participants almost uniformly expected to give birth, which they acknowledge 'may reflect gender role expectations enforced by the culture' (2001: 78); they also found that girls' 'explicit confidence in having a career' was 'significantly higher than the men's' (ibid: 78). Segal et al. (2001) go on to suggest that perhaps this study could be seen as evidence that young women are becoming increasingly 'comfortable with explicit expressions of professional ambition' (ibid: 78).

This optimism is not borne out by Brown et al. (2010) and Lips (2004) exploration of possible selves with reference to leadership, where they both find women are less likely than men to see possible selves as powerful/high status and more likely to envisage future inter-personal problems if imagining

themselves in leadership roles. Perhaps it is important to see this in the context of findings, which relate to girls' greater sensitivity to context (Oyserman and Fryberg, 2006):

Girls were more likely to shift up their academic possible selves when they thought of someone their same gender who was succeeding at school, and more likely to shift down these possible selves when they thought of someone they knew who was failing in school (Kemmelmeier and Oyserman, 2001, cited in Oyserman and Fryberg, 2006).

If we extrapolate this tendency outwards to the context of women and girls in our society, we might imagine the potential impact of the continued lack of representation by women in eminent positions and girls' construction of eminent possible future selves:

Many of these possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons in which the individual's own thoughts, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors have been contrasted to those of salient others. What others are now, I could become (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954).

2.5.2 Family selves and relationships

In terms of expectations of family, Greene and Debacker (2010) found that although female participants presented, 'more selves that are explicitly categorised as 'family' than do men' (2010: 577). They also found that both men and women foresaw 'family' as a 'central component of their possible selves' (ibid: 577), although Cury and colleagues (1994) cited in Oyserman and Fryberg (2006) find that girls were more likely to take 'into account their

likely need to take on parenting roles in imagining possible selves related to careers' (ibid: 30).

Fetterolf and Eagly (2007) found that the women in their study, 'who were highly qualified women attending a selective university' expected their future life to: 'bring them inequality in the form of fewer employment hours, smaller salary and more housework and childcare than their husbands' (2007: 90). Fetterolf and Eagly rightly draw attention to the deterministic outlook of their participants, highlighting the fact that even their most highly achieving participants, 'do not expect much societal movement toward greater gender equality' and therefore urging feminists to, 'rekindle in young women the belief that equality is an attainable and desirable goal' (2007: 91). These possible selves studies seem to echo the tone of the 'lived' narratives of the women in the 'Opt-Out' literature who saw stepping out, rather than collectively re-shaping the workplace as the most realistic option.

2.5.3 Failure and feared possible selves

'Feared possible selves' could be understood in Markus and Nurius' (1986) terms to be: 'the existence of well-elaborated negative possible selves that give vivid cognitive form to an individual's fears and insecurities' (1986: 962). In relation to these 'feared possible selves', Knox (2006) discusses Ogilvie and Clark's 1992 study, which found many differences between the 'ideal' and 'feared' possible selves of girls and boys. They found that while boys tended to envisage both ideal and feared possible selves as being, 'characterised by instrumentality', '90% of young women (as compared to 30% of males) referred to interpersonal qualities when defining their feared selves' (Knox,

2006, cited in Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006: 30). Knox also finds that adolescent girls may be more likely to avoid a 'feared possible self' by combining multiple, contradictory possible selves, in order to navigate the conflicting messages regarding gender and achievement which they are consistently exposed to: 'In the attempt to integrate the possible roles or selves into a coherent sense of self, girls may find themselves in a double bind situation. How can they be both passive and assertive? Both competitive and communally-oriented?' (2006: 69). Perhaps most powerfully, Knox cites her research with adolescents (2000) which, 'indicated that female adolescents rated their feared possible selves as significantly more likely than boys did. In addition, females feared their feared possible selves more than boys do' (2006: 72).

2.5.4 Construction of possible selves and interaction with texts

In Markus and Nurius' (1986) original study they make clear the powerful and potentially liberating effect which holding multiple possible selves in mind can have on both the present and future self. They also, however, make clear that the range of possible selves held by an individual are not constructed in isolation:

An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's social experiences (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954).

In light of this sense that possible selves are not constructed in a vacuum, a small number of studies have begun to explicitly explore the interaction

between the construction of possible selves and the influence of the media and/or literary texts. Zannettino (2008) explores the way in which girls' interactions with text and film shapes 'their present and imagined future selves' (2008: 467). Zannettino's study finds, like Knox (2006), that: 'the girls' tendency was to imagine several versions of idyllic womanhood' (2008: 469), involving career selves, whilst also being influenced by 'dominant discourses of exclusive mothering' (ibid: 469). By exploring the girls' construction of future selves through an interaction with fictional texts, Zannettino highlights the 'constructed' nature of the girls possible selves through the interplay between how they see themselves and their, 'identifying with the characters in their favourite texts' (2008: 477). Zannettino echoes Walkerdine's (1984) conclusion that, 'the positions and relations created in the text both relate to existing social and psychic struggle and provide a fantasy vehicle which inserts the reader into the text' (Walkerdine, 1984, cited in Zannettino, 2008: 165). Both of these studies support a Derridean exploration of the construction of possible selves as being enmeshed within text and language and therefore foregrounding the importance of the language and narratives which young women are exposed to in influencing their self-construct.

Finally, the 'possible selves' literature also points towards the benefits for participants in taking part in a study of this kind (Leondari et al., 1998; Greene and Debacker, 2004; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007) 'imagining one's own actions through the construction of elaborated possible selves achieving the desired goal is thought to facilitate directly the transition of goals into intention and instrumental action' (Leondari et al., 1998: 154).

2.5.5 Conclusions

These vast areas of literature can perhaps be best characterised by a return to Gavin et al.'s (2007) discussion of the movement from the imagery of Rosie the Riveter to Barbie, which they characterise as a social pattern with regards to female progress: a movement forwards followed by regression to hyper-femininity, fuelled by fear. This pattern is familiar from across the different fields of literature, where it seems to occur in a kind of 'call and response' movement: we begin to explore the dearth of women in eminent positions with reference to social attitudes and practices (Schwartz, 1989; Lewin, 1989; Banyard, 2010; Wellington, 2001; Wirth, 2001) and this discourse is met by a regression to the reductive explanations of neuroscience and biological gender difference (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Brizendine, 2006); Girls begin to experience significant and sustained educational success (see 2.3.5) and the discourse which emerges positions this success as a threat to the position of boys and the cause of their relative failure (Moxon, 2008; Hoff-Sommers, 2000).

The reality of the situation for highly able girls and eminent women is complex and interwoven by social and political considerations (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011; Ringrose, 2007; Skelton et al., 2010). However, as illustrated by many of the literature sets, this complexity is challenging and perhaps disheartening, and so many of the literatures reduce the complexity by returning to the individual and re-positioning the discussion to be one of psychological difficulty, character flaw or biological difference. This remains problematic in any attempt to reconstruct a more holistic explanation for the continued shortfall in eminent women.

Ultimately in exploring these literatures, I return to the words of Francis and Skelton (2005): there is a fundamental 'lack of discussion of girls...an absence, a silent gap in the discourse' (2005: 104) and there remains a silence around any real explorations of the lack of women in eminent positions. What seems to be missing is the voice of the highly able girl herself and her perceptions of what the journey from educational success towards eminence might mean. In this study, I am seeking to give voice to the perceptions of highly able girls themselves and to reconstitute a little of the complexity which is negated by some of the one-dimensional explanations offered by the literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

‘Bildungsroman is the novel of formation – formation of character and identity’ (Gill, 2006: 20).

‘To be an adult is to face choices. The child becomes an adult when he or she is faced with dilemmas’ (ibid: 21).

‘The image of the purposeful journey is present in novels such as Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Dickens’ *David Copperfield*’ (ibid: 295).

As detailed in the previous chapters, the aim of this study is to give voice to the highly able girls who have the potential to go on to become eminent women. In this section, I will explore the ways in which I produced a research design which aimed to provide a space for these young women to explore ‘possibility’ through a story-writing, possible selves methodology. This chapter aims to explore the ways in which I gathered data in order to respond to my initial research questions. These were:

- To what extent do high-achieving secondary schoolgirls hold positive perceptions of an ‘eminent’ possible self?

- To what extent do the students' narratives predict/reflect the internal/external barriers to female eminence depicted in the literatures?
- Do the 'possible selves' narratives of high-achieving secondary schoolgirls predict any of the concerns/difficulties experienced by 'eminent' women in the 'Opt-Out' literature?

In a study that revolves around narrative method, the analogy of the 'Bildungsroman' feels appropriate. As a genre, 'Bildungsroman' typically centres around a protagonist 'growing up' or moving from a state of ignorance to knowledge, overcoming difficulties and testing newly found learning. While I would not wish to confidently assert my having reached a state of 'knowledge', pursuing the EdD programme has certainly felt like a 'purposeful journey' filled with challenges and resultant learning – like that of the Bildungsroman protagonist. With this analogy in mind, the 'Methodology' section of the research journey feels like the real area of developmental 'formation'. It is here that, as an EdD student, I have faced the crucial and difficult 'choices' and 'dilemmas', which must underpin the research design. It is also with regards methodological considerations, where we could see the deconstruction of the Bildungsroman structure as appropriate; as more is learned about possible methodologies, framings and analytical strategies, I have become increasingly aware of the vastness of this area of study and how much there is still to learn. However, this is also the thinking which brings the research project to life and as Vandergrift (1990) notes: 'There is an exhilaration in research – the thrill of the chase; the excitement of an argument; the taste of an awesome idea' (Vandergrift, 1990: 49), which, I would argue, is made real as thoughts turn to methodological decision-making.

Silverman (1993) underlines the idea that: 'like theories, methodologies cannot be true or false, only more or less useful' (1993: 4). With this in mind, this section will discuss the choices and utility of my methods and forms of data analysis. I hope to capture some of the excitement of this process and the sense in which I have experienced this methodological journey as teacher-researcher in a spirit of: 'childlike openness, risk-taking and (as a) continual process of learning all over again' (Vandergrift, 1990: 49).

In a study with a distinctly narrative focus, I intend to tell a 'story within a story': the 'story' of my methodology within the 'story' of this study. I shall discuss the type of data which I chose to collect (possible selves narratives (Markus and Nurius, 1986) using a story-writing approach); how I collected the data and the rationale behind my choices. I will also outline my use of 'multiple analytic frames' drawn from Wickens (2011). I intend to discuss the application of these methods, alongside some of the limitations of these methods of enquiry.

3.2 The story of 'why'

3.2.1 Rationale for using narrative methodology

As my research project focuses upon girls' perceptions of future eminence, I see the use of narrative as a medium, which allows for a rich, exploratory account. Narrative research methods have become ubiquitous in the social sciences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Freeman, 1993; Polkinghorne, 2007)

and in choosing a narrative method, I am also acknowledging the post-modern move away from empiricist objectivity.

A narrative approach draws attention to the idea that our experience and the experiences we describe are inevitably 'storied' (Polkinghorne, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Polkinghorne (1991) outlines the view that we make cognitive sense of the world through narrative; that we tell many stories of both a public and private kind in order to construct meaning and self-hood. Similarly, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) make clear the logical step between 'understanding the world narratively' and therefore 'study(ing) the world narratively' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 17). Packard and Conway (2006) make a useful distinction between two prominent theories of self: 'self as a collection of schemas' (Markus and Wurf, 1987) and self as a story (Bruner, 1990, cited in Packard and Conway, 2006: 253). Adherence to either of these constructs has an important impact upon the construction of a narrative research project:

Central to the self-as-storyteller metatheory is the notion of the self as an unfinished narrative project that can be co-constructed with the researcher, whereas the self as a collection of schemas may be more aligned with a view of the researcher as a miner of information (Kvale, 1996, cited in Packard and Conway, 2006: 254).

It is worth clarifying here that this study rests upon an acceptance of the construct of 'the "narrative fabric" of the self' (Freeman, 1997, 1998, cited in Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004, p.63) and the 'co-construction' which accompanies it.

This study is rooted in issues of identity and self-hood; therefore, as Whitty (2002) argues 'If...identity is a life story, then using narrative techniques to investigate people's hopes and dreams could be of great benefit to researchers' (2002: 212). In getting participants to create a future 'possible self', as this study does, narrative allows the construction of an imagined identity and enables greater reflexivity. McClean and Pasupathi (2010) identify that 'identity development in adolescents integrates past, present and anticipated future' (2010, xix). The wrestling with these different elements of identity can be both, 'fragmented and coherent at the same time' (Negash, 2004, cited in Watson, 2011: 399) and the space provided by narrative method, is able to accommodate this uncertainty and bear witness to adolescents' 'working through' of various aspects of current and potential identity, in a way which structured interview or questionnaire may not allow.

3.2.2 Why use story writing as narrative method?

No story is uni-dimensional in its voice – a story may have melody, pitch, loudness....many interwoven, sometimes conflicting, themes and form... (Lieblich et al., 1998:168).

I see a number of strengths in eliciting data through 'story writing,' as suggested by the aforementioned quotation. Firstly, allowing participants to tell the 'story' of their future selves will allow a greater 'richness' and 'complexity' (Duff and Bell, 2002: 2) to emerge; they will not be bound by the confines of a questionnaire or pre-decided set of interview questions.

Secondly, a story writing methodology allows for data to be viewed as multi-vocal:

We frame our research in terms of narrative because we believe by doing so, we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change (Andrews et al., 2008:1).

This is of particular relevance to the research questions in this study, which seek to explore the influences of wider social discourses of gender, expectation and 'success' on participants' perceptions of eminence.

Unlike autobiographical narrative research, the stories told by the participants in this study were not based upon past experiences but were fictional explorations of possible futures as eminent women. Watson (2011) suggests that while 'narrative' research may have gained widespread acceptance:

this acceptance may not extend to the use of fictional narratives...this reluctance is no doubt the result of a deeply felt need for research to be grounded in an empirical reality of something that *really happened*... (Watson, 2011:396).

Spindler (2008) expresses similar concerns about the positioning of 'fiction' as educational research: 'The legitimacy of fiction in educational research is still contested and there is continuing concern about how to evaluate it' (Spindler, 2008:19). In response to these concerns, I would suggest that the use of 'fictions' in this study is in keeping with my positioning regarding the conception of 'self' as a narrative construct (Sermijn et al., 2008; Polkinghorne,

1991). Furthermore, in a study revolving around 'perceptions' and 'possible selves', participants were inevitably constructing 'fictions' (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and story-writing provided a potentially expansive method for doing so.

Secondly, the use of a 'story writing' method is supported by other studies (Whitty, 2002; Packard and Conway, 2006), which have evaluated a number of methods as a means of facilitating participants' exploration of 'ideal or hoped for selves' (Whitty, 2002: 224). In asking students to imagine themselves in a position of 'future eminence', I inherently explored 'ideal or hoped-for selves.' Whitty (2002) found a number of justifications for using a 'story writing method' in this instance. Firstly, he found that, 'story writing method was more successful at elucidating participants' ideal or hoped for selves,' whereas interviews and questionnaires, 'tapped more into actual, ought-to, or expected selves' (ibid: 224). Secondly, Whitty (2002) also found that the 'story writing method' 'provided greater opportunity for those who would like to envisage grand futures for themselves, to do so,' (ibid: 226), as opposed to the interview data where the 'overall tone...appeared to be more serious and somewhat less ambitious' (ibid: 223). Finally, Watson (2011) points towards a further source of richness inherent in 'fictionalisation': 'In contrast to more conventional forms of representation in social research, (fictionalisation) taps into the emotional aspects of existence' (Watson, 2011: 403-404). In terms of this study, it is this exploratory quality of fictional narrative writing, which feels fit for purpose; participants need to be able to 'try on' a life of future eminence, including the accompanying emotional aspects, and I feel that the medium of fictional narrative provides a potentially safe space in which to do so.

Finally, I believe that the requirement that students 'write' rather than 'speak' their narrative will allow for a slower, more thoughtful response, allowing for their revision of material and the shaping and construction of their 'story' to a greater degree than an oral response. Story construction involves additional layers of narrative choice, as Rieseeman (2002) suggests: 'Narrative studies open up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told *that way*?' (2002: 218). These choices about 'how' the story is to be told are foregrounded to a greater extent when responses are allowed the slower process of writing, in comparison with the immediacy of interview.

I do, however, recognise a number of potential critiques that could be levelled at this methodology. In 'Doing Narrative Research' (2008), Squire calls for caution in the reminder that, 'stories are performed differently in different social contexts' (Squire in Andrews et al., 2008: 44). With regards to my own study, I am aware that an English teacher collecting narratives in an English teaching classroom, in the middle of the school day, may well have elicited a different kind of narrative from one produced by the same student in a different location, at a different time with a non-teacher researcher. However, this merely underlines the importance of viewing this data as 'situated': a product of its timing and context. This is not to entirely negate the value of the data set but it is to suggest maintaining a sensitivity to the impact of its context of production, as I'm suggesting should be the case with any study.

While, like Watson (2011), I view the 'potential openness of fictional narrative forms' which enable 'multiple interpretations' and 'foster...productive ambiguity' (2011:403-404) as a source of celebration, I am mindful of Watson's citation of Eisner's (1997) concern regarding the 'potential 'perils' that this can engender in terms of loss of 'precision' (Eisner, 1997, cited in Watson, 2011: 403-404). I would argue, however, that the language of 'precision' is inappropriate for a narrative study and derives from, perhaps, mistakenly applying a positivist lens to an interpretivist method. Watson (2009) also notes the misgivings of Charles Tilly and his 'distrust' of stories. Tilly's objection is, however, different in character from Eisner's and seems to be concerned with the power of stories to mislead the self and others, 'Sociology's strongest insights do not take the form of stories and often undermine the stories people tell' (Tilly, 1999, cited in Watson, 2009:1.1). In the sense that stories can, if accepted unquestioningly, merely replicate the dominant 'stories' told by culture and society, I think there is a useful note of caution for the narrative researcher in this critique that should prompt us to be alert to the inevitable 'intertextuality' of the stories under exploration. These 'stories' cannot be viewed as divorced from the many other stories, which shape them: 'One's self-concept or self-identity is fashioned by adaptation of plots from one's cultural stock of stories and myths' (Polkinghorne, 1991: 135). Finally, Duff and Bell (2002) also outline, what they deem to be, a potential weakness in a narrative approach: 'participants construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves excluding experiences and events that undermine the identities they currently claim' (Duff and Bell, 2002:3). I acknowledge the idea that a narrative exploration of 'possible selves' will inevitably be based upon the version of identity, both consciously and

unconsciously, that a participant is willing to present at a given time. Within this study, I have taken this idea into account by examining participants' use of figurative language, intertextuality and suggestions of 'feared possible selves'; this has allowed me to explore a range of discourses, some of which potentially go beyond the narrator's consciously controlled presentation of 'self'. Fundamentally, rather than resting upon an assumption that this study will 'unveil' timeless versions of the participants' identities, it is instead founded upon the acknowledgement that I am applying a single, simplified lens (gender) to the situated, mutable 'narrative truths' in the 'stories we tell ourselves about ourselves' (Geertz, 1973).

3.2.3 Rationale for using possible selves

The notion of exploring 'possible selves' began with the work of Markus and Nurius in 1986 and, as Kerpelman and Dunkel (2006) acknowledge, grew in the intervening 20 years into 'an exciting stream of research' (Markus and Nurius, 1986: vii). Markus and Nurius (1986) refer to possible selves as 'the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become and the selves we are afraid of becoming' (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954) therefore this felt like a highly appropriate methodology for a study focusing on participants' perceptions of 'future eminence.'

Furthermore, I was seeking a framework which would focus participants upon a projection of themselves and their *own* future 'eminence' rather than a 'third-person' discussion of the concept; this again lent itself to a 'possible selves' method.

As discussed in the literature review on ‘possible selves,’ many of the studies have focused upon ‘work possible selves’ (Pisarik and Shoffner, 2009; Brown et al., 2010; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007; Lips, 2004) in terms of gender; ‘family selves’, relationships, (Brown et al., 2010; Greene and Debacker, 2004; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007) and expectations of future equality, (Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007). Therefore, I thought it would be interesting to build upon these studies and narrow the lens a little, to focus upon ‘eminence’ with high achieving adolescent girls.

In terms of the rationale for my method of eliciting possible selves data, I differed from the majority of studies. Packard and Conway (2006) conduct a meta-analysis of ‘possible selves’ studies, identifying that methods could be broadly divided into ‘four methodological clusters: structured survey, interview narrative, visual and drama’ but of these, ‘the original and most frequently used practices were structured surveys and interviews’ (2006: 225). I chose to use a narrative, story-writing method, partly, in acknowledgement of the potential disadvantages of the more structured interview and questionnaire methods:

They do not encourage input from participants themselves apart from the answers to the predefined questions. Thus, a disadvantage is that the researcher may not learn about aspects of possible selves not originally conceived by the researcher (Packard and Conway, 2006: 257).

This was also partly in recognition of the space allowed by a written narrative method for the ‘complexity and confusion to surface’ (Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006), which the literature suggests might arise as teenagers begin to

consider the competing demands and expectations on their future selves. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) make reference to Bakhtin's idea that: 'we experience the self within the liminal space between what is and what could be' (Bakhtin, cited in Daiute and Lightfoot, 2004: 36) and it was in deference to the potential complexity of the process of considering 'possible selves' which meant that I sought an 'open ended narrative method' in order to 'allow participants greater control and input into the process' (Packard and Conway, 2006: 260). It is also worth noting here why I did not choose to use the 'anticipated life history' (ALH) measure (Segal et al., 2001), which does utilise a 'freely written narrative.' Although there are similarities between ALH and the possible selves adaptation, the ALH method, 'allows subjects to articulate how they imagine their future possible selves will unfold over time' (Segal et al., 2001: 60). This was not a focus I wished to give my study, as given the limited time in which participants would be writing to the narrative prompt they were given, I needed participants to presuppose that they had already reached a point in their future where they were considered 'eminent' rather than detailing the journey of getting there which, although interesting, would go beyond the remit and time restraint of this study. Secondly, the ALH method involved a subsequent style of analysis that I found overly prescriptive, and potentially reductive with use of: 'a scoring manual to code the responses for life events and psychological qualities' (ibid: 4). Finally, ALH method focuses on 'not imagining an idealised life but one that they plausibly expect to live' (Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006: 85). This is again different from the focus of my study, which is not concerned with the 'plausible' but with the highest level of the 'possible.'

Potential benefits to the participants of the study provided a further justification for adopting a 'possible selves' approach (Leondari et al., 1998; Greene and Debacker, 2004; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007). Dunkel and Kerpelman (2006) identify the application of a 'possible selves' method to education as 'a growing area' which can be seen to offer, 'a unique and viable approach to helping adolescents learn ways to identify and work toward attainable self-goals in the academic and career domains' (Dunkel and Kerpelman, 2006: vii). In this regard, for the high-achieving girls which I was working with 'eminence' is an 'attainable', if ambitious, goal and I see the imagining of a possible 'eminent' self as having the potential to allow an exploration of a previously unconsidered path. Dunkel and Kerpelman (2006) go further regarding the possible benefits when they acknowledge that: 'possible selves can work to energise actions and to buffer the current self from everyday dragons' (ibid: xi). All of the aforementioned benefits highlight perhaps the most convincing rationale for selecting a possible selves design: a potentially positive impact for the research participants.

3.3 The story of what I did and how I did it

At their broadest, the methodological choices I have made fall into the qualitative, interpretative paradigm (Cohen et al., 2007) being 'characterised by a concern for the individual' (2007: 21) and centrally engaged in what Cohen et al. define as the 'central endeavour...of the interpretive paradigm' as being to 'understand the subjective world of human experience' (2007: 21). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe the 'field of qualitative research as defined by a series of tensions, contradictions and hesitations,' (cited in Lieblich et

al., 1998: 7), which echoes the humility, uncertainty and respect for contradiction, which is in keeping with a post-structural stance on knowledge and research. Cohen et al's, (2007) definition of what interpretative researchers do, strikes a similar note:

They begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. Theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations (Cohen et al.: 22).

This description of research emphasises the individual participant and their story as central and situated in context, which was crucial to this study's attempt to 'give voice' to the highly able young women at its heart.

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) argue that we are in an 'era in Western societies where thick forms of qualitative knowledge production are challenged by neopositivistic and reductionistic modes of 'evidence based research' (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004:1). Barone (2007), similarly, suggests that we are in an era which has seen 'a narrowing of the officially sanctioned methodological spectrum' (Barone, 2007: 454, cited in Watson, 2011). I was keen to maintain an openness towards a range of methodological possibilities, not necessarily those deemed fitting for replicable educational research studies, as I wanted to explore the complexities of the research and its intersections. With this in mind, I was interested by the philosophical underpinnings of the 'methodological bricolage' outlined by Kincheloe and Berry (2004) and drawn upon by Wickens (2011). The Bricoleur's understanding that, 'researchers' interaction with the objects of their inquiries is always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable and, of course, complex,' (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004:3) is an appealing and interesting one. Kincheloe

and Berry urge that, 'the education of researchers demands that everyone take a step back from the process of learning research methods,' advising that, 'such a step back allows us a conceptual distance that produces a critical consciousness' (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004: 3).

The EdD programme has been structured in a way which went beyond this 'passive acceptance of externally imposed research methods' (ibid: 3) feared by Kincheloe and Berry by encouraging the process of reflecting on professional practice within the context of wider theoretical concerns; however, although the notion of bricolage is appealing, Kincheloe and Berry reminds us that, 'becoming a bricoleur who is knowledgeable of multiple research methodologies and their use is a lifetime endeavor' (ibid: 4) and one which, as a beginning researcher remains for me an aspiration, rather than a reality. With this in mind, I chose to mirror some aspects of methodology employed by a more experienced, knowledgeable researcher, Wickens (2011) who was more able to create a 'methodological bricolage.' However, before discussing what I did with the stories collected, I want to outline the way in which I collected the narrative data.

3.3.1 Data collection and sampling

3.3.1.1 The pilot project

My small-scale pilot project was crucial in clarifying a number of issues regarding the practicalities of data collection. For the pilot study, I was limited in terms of time and in terms of which students were available for me to work with, therefore, my initial data collection was with 5 girls of different ages taken

from different year groups and representing a wide range of academic abilities, rather than all being of high-ability (as defined by the school). Due to the limited literacy levels of a number of my pilot study participants (the pilot project was undertaken in a comprehensive school, rather than the grammar school context of the final project), I had to remove the use of 'eminence' and replace it with the idea of 'successful and high-achieving.' In the prompt that I used as part of the pilot study, I also included bullet-points which prompted students to think about: 'their future home', 'leisure time', 'relationships and children', as well as 'career.' I allowed approximately 50 minutes for students to write their narratives in response to the prompt.

The main difficulties encountered during the pilot related to the structuring of the written prompt. None of the five participants utilised the full 50 minutes for writing their response and around half the students completed their writing within around 20 minutes. The participants worked through the bullet points that I provided, using them as a kind of checklist and meaning that, as I listed 'Career' as the final bullet-point that they came to this aspect last and often wrote very little in relation to this area. This was clearly a difficulty in creating meaningful data for my purposes as I intended to analyse the way the participants structured their narrative and also wished to focus specifically on career eminence. Therefore in the final project, as well as working with students who were all defined as 'high ability', I also changed the narrative prompt instructions to remove the bullet-points. I thought about allowing for less writing time, but decided that, from my experiences of teaching narrative writing to higher-ability students, they might be more likely to write for a more extended period.

3.3.1.2 The Final Project

I collected written 'stories' from 10 Year 10 (14-15 year old) students. I chose to work with Year 10 students on a practical level as they had more time and availability than Year 11 or 6th form at an age where they may have begun to think more seriously about their future career aspirations and would already have selected their GCSE options: the first choice among many in defining future career paths. Furthermore, in light of the American literature (Pipher, 1994; Kerr, 1985) surrounding girls' identity and aspiration, 14 was highlighted as a pivotal age for girls in terms of the loss of the pre-pubescent androgynous self and subsequent shaping of gender identity. My decision regarding the collection of data from 10 students is based upon my recognition that 'narrative' provides a rich and potentially voluminous source of data. In terms of my analytical methods, (which I outline in 3.4) I saw it as important to keep a relatively low number of participants in order to be able to explore each narrative in sufficient depth; however, I also wished to gather enough narrative data to generate potential 'themes.'

3.3.1.3 Sample

The student sample was selected from across all four classes of Year 10 in a high-performing girls' grammar school. The school is selective and in the case of the students in Year 10 at the time of the study, based its selection of pupils on a verbal and non-verbal '11+ test'; therefore, the definition of the students in this study as high-achieving is based upon their attendance at this selective school. At the time when the students in this study entered the school, 120 students were admitted each year and the school was highly over-subscribed.

The school has a lower than average proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals (2%) and a higher than average proportion of students with English as an additional language (41.4%). The school introduced a catchment-area priority for admission in 2013 but this would not have applied to the students in this study, meaning that they could have been drawn from a very wide area across London, Surrey and beyond. The Year 10 Head of Year selected the sample of 10 students; she selected two students from each class list and an additional two. She described her selection of students from class lists as 'random'; however, I recognise that this is far from ideal in this regard. I felt that I had to tread a careful balance between being overly demanding in my requests to the school and ensuring that I was going to be confident in the data collected. An improvement that I could have implemented might have been to request that we ask for the participation of certain 'numbers' of students from alphabetically ranked class lists e.g. student 1, 7 and 13 etc.

The students I have gathered data from will be identified 'high ability' on a relatively narrow basis; however, for the purposes of my study, I am interested in the students who have managed to be 'successful' by society's standards and who 'should', according to these standards go on to achieve at the highest level.

While it might be interesting to explore responses from students with the 'potential' for later eminence, who have not demonstrated 'high ability' according to the measurements of the British secondary school, it goes

beyond the remit of the present study to explore this and perhaps points a way forward for further research.

3.3.2 Narrative Prompt

As outlined in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, my decision to use a 'possible selves' method, which asked students to write stories, was based upon seeing that this method would allow a space to explore, consider and work through a potential future as an eminent woman. I asked participants to write stories of their future 'possible selves'. Whitty (2002) gave his participants the following instructions:

They were asked to write a story about how they would like to see themselves in 10 years. They were given an hour to complete the task, although most participants took about 40 minutes to write their stories (Whitty, 2002: 215).

The prompt used by Whitty was:

Write a story about how you would like to see yourself in the next 10 years. Write the story in the third person. Include as much detail as possible and particularly avoid censoring details that seem irrelevant. Avoid psychological interpretation. Include any obstacles that get in the way of achieving your dreams/goals. Produce the most vivid story about how you will achieve your dreams/goals (ibid: 215).

Similarly, Poole (1983, cited in Whitty, 2002) asked respondents to write an essay based upon:

Myself in ten years' time: e.g. what kind of job you'll have, whether or not you'll be married, the kind of person you'd like to marry, where you'll live, what kind of person you'll be, what kinds of things you'll be doing etc. (Poole, 1983, cited in Whitty, 2002: 216).

I drew inspiration from these prompts; however, I decided that in order to avoid leading the participants' responses in any direction, I wanted to keep the suggestions in my prompt to the minimum. This echoes the method of Ruvolo and Markus (1992): 'We used an open-ended format to elicit possible selves, following the idea that free response methods are more successful in tapping aspects of possible selves' (Ruvolo and Markus, 1992, cited in Leondari et al., 1998: 156). I felt that merely mentioning 'marriage' or 'where you will live' would focus participants in writing to these suggestions like bullet-points, whereas I was interested to see 'if' they might choose to write about these aspects or totally disregard them. The idea of keeping my written prompt minimal was also developed as a result of my pilot study, where I found that any suggestions I had provided for aspects of a future possible existence which they might want to consider, were taken less as suggestions and more as bullet-points to be addressed and ticked off, thus detracting from the openness of the study. With this in mind, I decided to give the following instructions:

Imagine your future life as an adult woman. In whatever your chosen field, I want you to imagine that you have become an 'eminent' figure (clarify definition of 'eminence' using pre-prepared definition) I would like you to describe a day in your future life as an eminent woman. I would like you to provide as much detail as possible about every aspect of your imagined life.

In line with phrasing used in other possible selves studies, I originally used the phrasing, 'Imagine your life at some point in the future between the age of 21 and your death.' During the process of establishing consent I consulted with the head teacher of the school where I was collecting the data and she invited me to consider the idea that merely mentioning 'age 21' and 'death', might

function in the same way that my pilot project prompts did, in other words, they may lead students to focus misleadingly on these two points in life, rather than focusing on their projected self in the midst of an eminent career, as I had intended.

In meeting the students on the day, I initially introduced myself and re-assured students that this was no kind of 'test' and that they should not worry if they were not able to write for the full allocation of time allowed. In briefing the students prior to beginning their writing, I also introduced the fact that I was completing an EdD by working on this project in schools, but that I was also an English teacher and would be working at their school in September. The students and parents had already read simplified explanations of the project and signed consent forms prior to the meeting. Following my introduction, I merely read the prompt and definition of 'eminence' to them and asked them to begin when they wished. The students' Head of Year was in a classroom at the end of the corridor and in the event of a student becoming distressed or finishing the task particularly quickly, I knew that she was on-hand or that students could be allowed to go to her classroom. I allowed just under an hour for students to complete their narratives and the majority of the students finished their writing around 10 to 15 minutes prior to the end of the session. As students were writing, I avoided circulating in a way which might suggest I was reading over their shoulder or which might add any further sense of direct scrutiny, and instead remained at a desk at the side of the room. At the end of the session, I reiterated the fact that they could ask for the return of their data at any point, reminded them that they had a copy of my email address on the consent form and confirmed that they would receive a summary version of the

final project, in which their data would be presented anonymously, upon completion. A student did subsequently contact me using the email address provided in order to 'double-check' that she would be anonymised in the study. I replied to reassure her of her anonymity. These final issues relating to the wider ethical concerns of this study need to be explored here in greater detail.

3.3.3 Transcribing, safeguarding and validating data

Maxwell (1992) argues that there is a 'need to replace positivist notions of validity in qualitative research with the notion of authenticity' (Cohen et al., 2007: 133). In exploring 'perceptions' of students, I believe I am making an appropriately 'valid' knowledge claim for my narrative approach: 'perceptions' are merely the small stories we tell ourselves and my method, therefore, foregrounds this: 'a valid knowledge claim is dependent upon the kind of claim made' (Polkinghorne, 2007: 4). With this in mind, I will not be claiming that the results of this project are fully generalisable or objective. The 'validity' I do claim for my study, 'might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved' (Maxwell, 1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2007:133) and through the 'robustness of data analysis' (Wickens, 2011: 152) achieved through the application of multiple analytic methods.

One caveat in terms of validity needs to be made with regards to the 'coding' process, adopted as part of my 'constant comparative method.' With reference to coding, Whitty (2002) describes 'checking reliability of coding procedures with 10% of the data recorded by a trained scorer.' Similarly, Silverman (2001) calls attention to reliability in terms of coding as: 'the degree

of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions'

(Hammersley, 1992, cited in Silverman, 2001: 225). However, I was unable to find a second person to assist with or check my coding process, so had to rely on my own efforts to read and re-read data in order to apply some sense of consistency to my 'codes.'

With regards to the transcription and safeguarding of data, I took a number of measures to ensure best practice. The stories written by the students were initially hand-written. In the first instance, I collected these stories in after the students had written them. I ensured that students did not write their names on the scripts, only the number allocated to them. I created a numbered spread sheet with participants' names and the numbers that they had been given to identify their stories. I kept the list of participants and assigned numbers as two separate documents. In my discussion of data and analysis, (see Chapter 4, p.122) I used pseudonyms drawn from the play 'Top Girls', which formed part of my rationale for this study, in order to preserve anonymity whilst maintaining the narrative mood of the study through utilising a literary reference. In electronic form, I have stored this information on two encrypted, password protected memory sticks. I will keep hard copies of the students' stories in a folder in a lockable filing cabinet at the University of Roehampton for at least 10 years after the completion of the project.

3.3.4 Ethical considerations

Firstly, I undertook the ethics proposal process and my research proposal was approved by the appropriate Faculty Research Ethics Committee. I ensured that I had downloaded and adhered to the BERA (British Educational Research Association) ethical guidelines, 2012 throughout the project. I remained aware, however, that in working with children and young people: 'No abstract or universal prescriptive ethical rules can unthinkingly be followed in social research with children' (Edwards and Aldred, 1999, cited in Farrell, 2005: 4). Instead, Edwards and Aldred (1999, cited in Farrell, 2005) and Sargeant and Harcourt (2012) cite the importance of combining adherence to ethical guidelines with 'thoughtful consideration', an awareness of 'specific contexts' (Edwards and Aldred, 1999, cited in Farrell, 2005: 4) and a 'great deal of reflection' (Sargeant and Harcourt, 2012: 10).

In selecting my methodology, I was aware that a number of ethical concerns might be raised. Howe and Moses (1999) raise the idea that interpretative research is uniquely based upon 'intimacy' and 'openness.' While this is useful in giving the potential for authentic participant' responses, Howe and Moses (1999) also raise the additional ethical concerns that studies of this nature might raise: 'What intimacy and open-endedness mean for researchers employing qualitative techniques and procedures is that they are (whether they want or intend to or not) likely to discover secrets and lies as well as oppressive relationships' (1999: 40). This is relevant to the prompt that I used with students as, although commonplace in primary schools, it is rare that secondary school students are asked to engage in writing of such a personal nature and there is, therefore, a more 'intimate' quality to what is being asked of them and thus the possibility that students may use the opportunity to share

difficult aspects of their lives, given that the task may have almost a reflective, 'diary-like' quality for participants. It was, therefore, important to be sensitive to any material, which could have been deemed troubling in terms of child-protection or other concerns. I was aware of Tinson's (2009) caution in warning that in engaging in ethical research with children: 'researchers should make provision for the potential disclosure of abuse in the planning stages of the proposed study regardless of the topic being discussed or researched' (2009: 23). As discussed in 3.3.2 the students' Head of Year also remained in a classroom at the end of the corridor for the duration of the data collection; therefore, I was aware that this was somewhere that students could be directed to if they experienced any difficulty or distress during the writing time.

In the longer term, I was aware of avoiding Homan's (Homan, 2001 cited in Tinson, 2009) suggestion of 'covert research' where the researcher may gain ethical approval and complete their project accordingly but fails to consider the implications for young participants at the end of the project. With this in mind, I made students aware of the debriefing services available to them and reminded them that they should contact their personal tutor, or Head of Year (in keeping with the school's pastoral structure) in case of any difficulties or distress. Howe and Moses (1999) describe the difficulties for the researcher in this potential circumstance: 'These discoveries may put research participants at risk in ways that they had not consented to and that the researcher had not anticipated. These discoveries may also put researchers in the position of having to decide whether they have an ethical responsibility to maintain the confidentiality of the participants or expose them' (1999: 40). I was aware from the outset that a decision of this nature would have to be made carefully

in light of the specifics of the situation; however, in line with the BERA guidelines (2011), if anything was revealed which, 'will allow the continuation of illegal behaviour' or 'if the behaviour is likely to be harmful to the participants or to others,' then 'the researchers must also consider disclosure' (2011: 8). In which case, I would have spoken to the teacher/s in school who I had contact with (who was also the Head of Year of the students involved) in order to ensure that normal child protection procedure was followed.

This study gained further ethical complexity when my job changed during the course of my research. Originally, I intended to collect data from a school where I was not working; however, during the course of the study I gained employment at the school where I intended to carry out my research. I completed my work with research participants prior to being a recognisable employee at the school; however this still raised some ethical considerations. Would the students have constructed the same narratives if I had already been their teacher? Might some aspects of their stories have been shaped differently? How was the power-dynamic of the research relationship different in light of my 'teacher' identity? I attempted to mitigate my concerns by informing participants when I met with them to collect their narratives that they would be seeing me around school in September, when I would be taking up a post as an English teacher; this information was also clearly communicated to parents and guardians on the consent form. I felt this was important in the interest of openness and authenticity. When I subsequently took up my post, two of the students who took part in my study were in my English class. While this situation was unavoidable, I feel that this was also potentially ethically problematic, as it could have involved a kind of 'self-exposure' for the

participants. The 'possible self' revealed in a narrative to an anonymous 'researcher' who will at some future point be employed at their school, might foreseeably be quite different from the 'possible self' constructed with the eyes of your English teacher in mind. By providing a university email address which participants were advised to contact with any queries or further issues, a request which was taken-up by one of the participants (as detailed in 3.2.2.), I feel I have provided an opportunity for participants to communicate potential difficulties, using a method with which they clearly felt confident. In her guidelines on conducting research with children and adolescents, Tinson underlines the importance of this continued opportunity for students to withdraw their consent from any research project:

It is important also to remember that consent is not an event but a process (Alderson, 1998) and that even when as a researcher, you have obtained consent, this consent must be on-going and the child must be able to withdraw their consent at any time (2009: 20).

Gaining employment within the school where I undertook the research also meant that I could have accessed a range of additional and potentially relevant data, e.g. ethnicity, FSM status, attainment information; however, having not originally asked for access to this data in relation to my study, I felt that to have used data gained from my position as teacher, rather than EdD researcher, would have been unethical (BERA, 2011).

3.3.5 The story of myself within the research

As Andrews et al., (2008) identify, 'We as narrative researchers are crucially a part of the data we collect; our presence is imprinted upon all that we do' (2008:17); an understanding of my own position is therefore particularly important. Firstly, I have been an English teacher for the past 9 years. With a

teaching-focus, when I ask students to write 'narrative', it has almost always been with the aim of securing a high GCSE coursework grade and adhering to the bullet-points of a grade descriptor sheet. I was aware therefore, that I needed to guard against my judgements regarding the 'quality' of the narratives that I was reading. I needed to 'read differently' suspending my tendency to 'assess' and replacing this with a more exploratory approach.

Secondly, I needed to be aware that my style of literary analysis is underpinned by my post-structural, feminist positioning (see 1.6.2). As a feminist, I was aware that I was likely to be keen to read the student narratives for evidence of cultural and social inequality. I recognised that I would have to be cautious about 'reading beyond and beneath' the narratives; I had to respect what was actually written, rather than forcing a reading in line with my own ideology (Squire et al., 2008). I also endeavoured to remain aware that:

We as narrative researchers are crucially a part of the data we collect; our presence is imprinted upon all that we do. It is left to us then to determine how we account for ourselves in the work that we do, to consider the impact of our own positioning (Squire et al., 2008: 17).

Within the phrasing of my research questions, I am aware of a number of implicit positions that I am adopting. Firstly, an exploration of 'eminence' reflects my existence in a Western society with an emphasis on individualism and achievement. I am also aware that I am seemingly engaged in a reification of 'eminence' as an obtainable entity. In choosing to explore the possible selves of 'high achieving' girls' conception of 'eminence', I am making the assumption that there is a potential link between 'intelligence' as defined by school based academic success and the attainment of 'eminence.' In

excluding girls deemed 'lower ability' from this study, I am rejecting the potentially viable view that 'eminence' might be more positively correlated with character traits such as 'resilience' or 'optimism' as with intelligence, as narrowly defined by school achievement.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to a number of constructs being used in this study. In my use of a narrative approach, I am adopting the belief that 'selfhood' and 'identity' are the products of 'storying.' With regards the philosophical issue of psychological continuity through time, I am adopting the stance that these 'stories' of self-hood are dynamic and 'situated', thus I acknowledge that the stories being told in my study are the products of the participants at this moment of time. With reference to gender, I am coming from a 'performative' perspective (Butler, 1990), in my view that 'gender' involves the performance of behaviours and attributes rather than an essentialist definition. Although I recognise the problematic relationship between my post-structural position and the binary-thinking inherent in a study which seems to falsely suggest that 'gender' might be isolated as a variable, this decision was partly based upon the level of data which I knew I would be able to readily access about the participants. With greater scope, I would seek to explore a more complex construction of participants' identities with reference to ethnicity, class and other identity markers.

In choosing this as an area of study, I must also acknowledge that my own schooling, teacher training and subsequent 9 years of teaching have been experienced when the neoliberal narrative of audit, standards and the commensurable (Ball, 1998) have been gradually coming to dominate the

educational landscape. Perhaps my study, with its exploration of 'achievement' conceived of in a linear, careerist sense is influenced by my immersion in a culture that has commodified credentials, achievement and increasingly 'well-being'. However, I would also argue that there remains a real need to explore the mismatch between the high achievement of young women in educational settings and the subsequent short-fall in 'eminent' women. Arnold et al. (1996) articulate the need for studies of this kind in their identification that:

Our society does not reap the advantages that could accrue from the full utilization of all its human resources. Just as important, women themselves do not frequently enough experience the joys and rewards associated with expressing their talents at the highest levels. The relative rarity of high achieving and eminent women raises not only the question of the fate of women with great potential, insight, and skill, but also the related question of what can be done to increase the presence of women in all sectors and at all levels of public life (Arnold et al., 1996: 3).

I would defend my choice of study by suggesting that the aforementioned issues remain unresolved and an exploration of highly able young women's early perceptions of future eminence may help us to understand the complexity of this problem.

3.4 More than one story to be told: the use of multiple textual analytic frames

In approaching the analysis of my data, I wanted to find a method which would allow me to approach the participants' stories from different angles and perspectives and it was this quest which led me towards Wickens' (2011) 'multiple textual analytic frames.' Wickens draws on three different analytical

frames in order to explore her data; she uses constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967); textual discursive analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2003) and literary analysis (Vandergrift, 1990).

3.4.1 Data analysis: Rationale for multiple textual analytic frames

It provides new angles of analysis, such that the data itself became prismatic. Just as a prism refracts light differently with each slight shift and turn of the prism, such was the case here. Holding the data up to a light, in this case the multiple research strategies, illuminated different colours, different elements – in a mercurial fashion' (Wickens, 2011:161).

The bricolage, like a crystal, expands, mutates, and alters while at the same time reflecting and refracting the 'light' of the social world. New patterns emerge and new shapes dance (Laura Richardson, 2000 cited in Kincheloe and Berry, 2004: 21).

These metaphors seem to capture the energy and possibility of using multiple, analytical methods. They also suggest the key idea that varying analytical frames allows for different perspectives: 'different colours, different elements' (Wickens, 2011: 161) 'new shapes' (Richardson cited in Kincheloe and Berry, 2004: 21) whilst maintaining a sense of the whole 'prism' or 'crystal' of the data itself. This idea of being able to explore a data set from different angles, maintaining a sense of the 'whole' and not falling foul of the reductive 'fracturing' which Riessman (2002) identifies as one of the pitfalls of qualitative research was what drew me towards Wickens' (2011) model of 'multiple textual analytic frames.'

Traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture texts in the service of interpretation and

generalization by taking bits and pieces, snippets of a response edited out of context. They eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts (Riessman, 2002, p.219).

Squire (2008) suggests that, 'the search for a valid interpretive frame is perhaps the research stage that causes most argument and concern' (Squire, 2008: 50). This felt true in terms of this study. I was seeking an analytical framework that would reflect the theoretical underpinning of the study; that would foreground the sense that the analysis of narrative always involves more than one way of reading; that would highlight the subjective nature of my own analysis and underline that these are perspectives rather than a single, authoritative 'truth'. Wickens' (2011) use of 'multiple interpretivist research strategies that each provided distinct, but overlapping analytic lenses' (Wickens, 2011:159) seemed to suggest a way forward in addressing these concerns.

Wickens' (2011) approach is undoubtedly more complex and lengthier than the use of a single analytic frame:

the inductive method of constant comparative analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985) enabled a broad, holistic analysis through the discernment of themes and meta-categories...Fairclough's (2003) textual discursive analysis allowed for close linguistic analysis..., while the focus of literary analysis (Vandergrift 1990) attended to central genre structures...especially character and plot development (ibid:159).

However, it was the complexity and richness of the approach, which appealed to me; the 'methodological bricolage' (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004) mentioned at the outset of this chapter seemed to counter the seductive simplicity that a single analytic strategy can lend to a study. The inherent complexity involved

in approaching data from more than one angle means the researcher does not collude in the illusion that a study can offer a single, authoritative analysis, instead keeping the subjectivity of a researcher's analytical 'choices' at the forefront.

If accepting the richness that can be drawn from multiple analytic methods, then the question becomes: why *these* analytical lenses? For Wickens (2011) the combination of these analytic methods was based upon the 'nature of my data....and the research questions that framed the study' (ibid: 162). The appeal of this approach for me lies in the idea that each methodology mitigates, to an extent, the weaknesses of the other methods hence the likelihood of strengthening the findings. Furthermore, the development in cognitive linguistics popularised by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which claims that metaphor and language are inextricably linked to our abilities to think and understand conceptually, means that textual analysis is an increasingly crucial methodological tool.

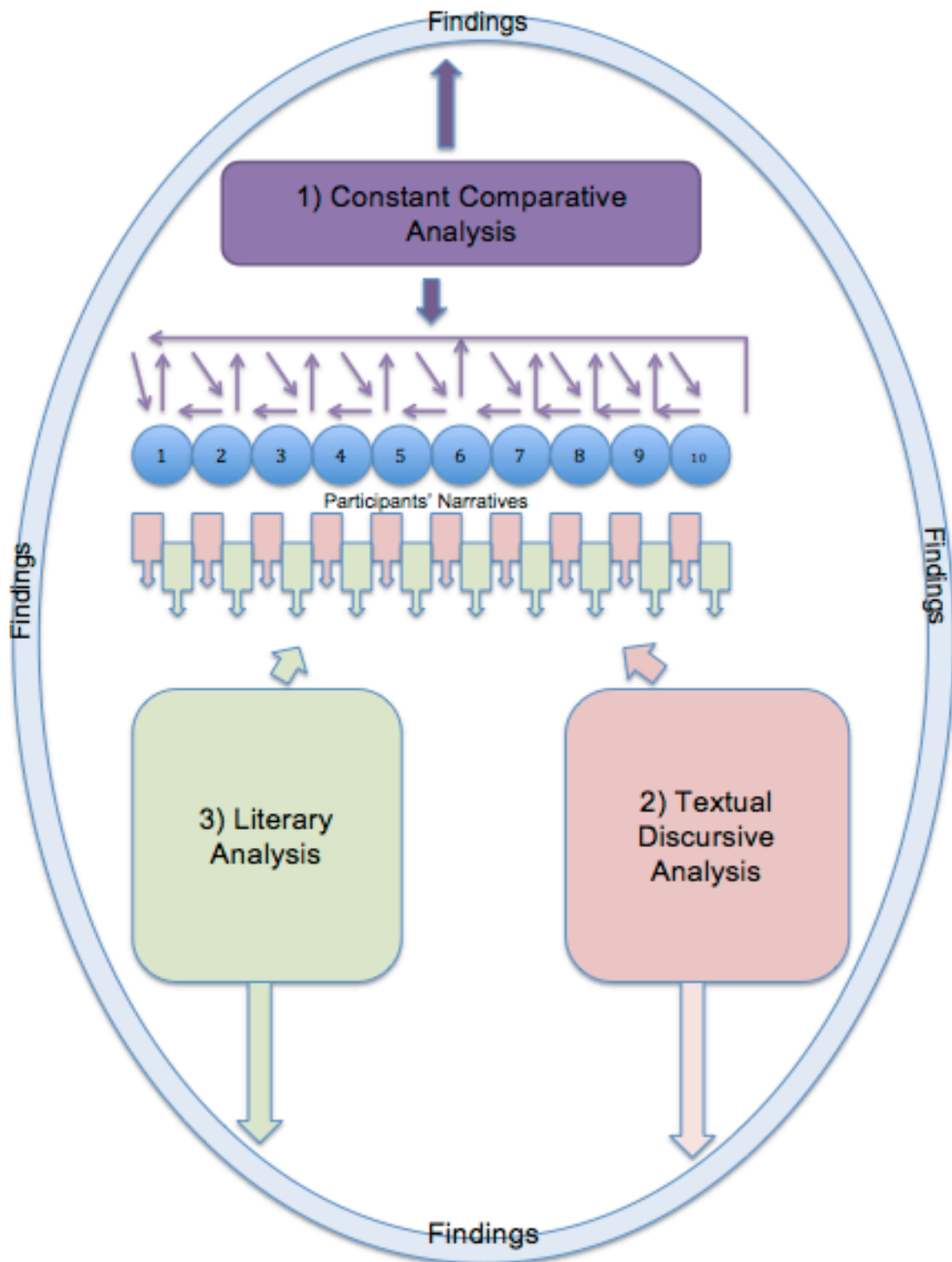
Wickens' study focuses on the presentation of gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers in fiction for young adults; her research questions focus upon forms of power. I felt that Wickens' analytical methods were also appropriate for my study, as I was also dealing in 'fictional accounts' and wanted to be able to do justice to the data by finding a means of analysis that respected the richness of each narrative. Furthermore, it seemed important that Wickens offered an approach that allowed for textual analysis on a micro (textual discursive analysis), meso (literary analysis) and macro (constant comparative method) level. With my narrative data, I wanted to be able to explore themes with

reference to my research questions, as well as specific language choices and structural elements, which the use of these three methods would allow.

In terms of adaptations to Wickens' analytic method, I did draw upon a range of different methodological base texts with regard to the style of my linguistic and particularly, literary analysis. While Wickens draws mainly upon Vandergrift (1990) in her style of literary analysis, I chose to broaden my literary approach with reference to a more feminist, post-structural style of analysis. Similarly, on a linguistic level, I also drew on Fairclough's (2003) 'textual discursive analysis' but moved away from Wickens' focus upon 'attention to medial vowels, placement of ellipses, word collocations, and coded phrases' (Wickens, 2011: 159) to focus more upon verb choices, sentence structures and intertextuality, as these provided a rich vein of analysis in my data. Finally, whereas Wickens draws on Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) as source texts, I consulted these but chose to follow Thomas' (2009) simplified outline of the constant comparative method (see Appendix 1). Perhaps a diagram outlining this process is the most effective way to visualise the way in which each analytic method allowed me to return to the narrative data afresh and informed my findings by approaching the participants' narratives from a slightly different angle.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of multiple analytical methods:

The representation of the 'constant comparative analysis' is intended to depict the reading and re-reading of each narrative in sequence, which was part of this approach. Whereas, the textual discursive and literary analysis dealt with each narrative separately, the constant comparative analysis involved looking across narratives



I am aware that while drawing on these different levels of analysis allows me to avoid the reduction of the data to 'one' way of seeing, it also means that I risk the three levels of analysis remaining disconnected from one another. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) warn of 'the monological quest for order' held by educational researchers, 'grounded on the Cartesian belief that all phenomena should be broken down into their constitutive parts to facilitate inquiry' (ibid: 5). In adopting a tripartite approach, I feel I am open to the charge of allowing the stories of my data to lie 'disconnected' from one another. I believe the use of the 'analytic triple entry journal' (see 5.2) goes some way towards 'integrating knowledges' and 'understanding...interconnections' (ibid: 5) by juxtaposing the different styles of analysis in one document.

3.4.2 Analytic triple entry journal

In order to capture thoughts and ideas in response to my data, I decided to use the 'analytic triple entry journal' (TEJ) described by Wickens. (2011) Wickens describes the analytic TEJ as a 'self-reflexive heuristic' (Wickens, 2011: 152) allowing for 'increased facility and flexibility in analysing different components of texts, including overarching themes across multiple texts, specific linguistic features, and authorial messages within specific texts' (ibid: 152). It was this flexibility which most appealed, as the use of the TEJ allowed responses to the data from different 'textual analytic lenses' to be collected in one place and juxtaposed against one another, rather than falsely separated: 'I could move more fluidly from one analytic method to another' (ibid: 159).

Wickens (2011) provides a clear elucidation of the use of the analytic TEJ, alongside a number of photocopied exemplars. Wickens' use of this method involves creating a document with three columns labelled: 'Topic/Thematic Category', 'Text Sources', and 'Analysis/Reflection.' I adapted Wickens' method to reflect my changing responses to my data over time by using colour coding for my 'Analysis/Reflection' statements. I used black text for my initial thoughts and a different colour every time I returned/re-read and responded afresh to the data. This enabled me to be more self-reflexive in exploring how my own analysis and exploration deepened and became more connected and comparative over time. It also allowed me to track the patterns of my analysis in terms of thematic, linguistic and literary approaches, which I allowed myself to move quite fluidly between in the manner of the bricoleur (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004), responsive to the study and data presented, rather than attempting to falsely 'sequence' my analytical approaches.

Most powerfully, the use of the analytic TEJ allowed, 'for my own voice to interweave with the texts' foregrounding the fact that there is no single, absolute response to my data and that I am, 'no objective, unbiased researcher; that I as researcher served as the instrument weaving a particular narrative drawn from other narratives' (Marshall, 1981; Wolcott, 1990 cited in Wickens, 2011: 161).

3.4.3 Constant comparative method

Thomas (2009) describes 'constant comparative method' as, 'the basic analytic method of the interpretative researcher', which 'stands behind every technique in this paradigm' (Thomas, 2009: 198) Derived from 'grounded

theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Thomas, 2009: 202) suggest that while other elements of grounded theory may now seem, 'inappropriate and outdated', 'constant comparison is the kernel of grounded theory worth preserving' (Thomas, 2009: 202). The use of constant comparative methods allow, 'central and recurring themes and motifs' (Wickens, 2011:153) to be discerned from across the data set and enables a 'broad, holistic analysis' (ibid: 159). This type of thematic analysis also appealed in sharing some of the qualities of literary analysis and therefore seemed appropriate to a narrative method.

Methods of using the 'constant comparative method' fall on a spectrum of differing methodological complexity. Miles and Huberman (2002) suggest a range of ways of conducting the constant comparative method, many of which, as Thomas (2009) asserts, 'make things appear more difficult than they really are.' Thomas (2009) suggests that constant comparative method really only involves: 'going through your data again and again...' followed by, 'comparing each element – phrase, sentence or paragraph – with all of the other elements' (ibid: 198) and goes on to outline a simple, step-by-step approach (see Appendix 1) which I drew on in my use of constant comparison, but adapted with use of Wickens' (2011) 'triple entry journal' as a space for recording and reflecting upon 'temporary' and 'second order constructs.'

I began by reading each narrative and attempting to 'unitise' (Wickens, 2011; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) the data into sections, which suggested certain themes and constructs in relation to my research questions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define 'a 'unit as the smallest piece of information about something that

can stand by itself,' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Wickens, 2011:153), in practice meaning a 'sentence or as much as a paragraph' (ibid: 153). There is the potential for this belief in the possibilities of 'unitising' meaning to be seen as reductive and a negation of the complex way in which a reader really constructs meaning from text, which is rarely from looking at singular 'units' without the context of the whole. In Wickens' analysis of fictional narratives, she attempts to go some way towards maintaining some complexity when conducting a constant comparative analysis in her finding that, 'narrative description and dialogue often required multiple paragraphs to convey a particular idea' (ibid: 153). My own 'unitising' fell somewhere nearer to the Lincoln and Guba (1985) notion, partially because the 'narratives' I was working with were produced within an hour, as opposed to being the novel-length professionally authored works that Wickens was discussing, where narrative description may well be thickened to a number of paragraphs. Working with the student narratives which I collected, meant that I was largely able to divide writing into 'units' of a sentence or two, or sometimes a short paragraph. Whilst recognising that if being used as the sole method of analysis, this process could have been somewhat reductive, this is mitigated by the restoration of the 'wholeness' of the text in the subsequent literary analysis.

Like Whitty (2002), I 'considered it necessary to document as many of the themes as possible, even if only a few of the participants mentioned them' (Whitty, 2002: 219). As my reading and re-reading progressed, I began to attribute 'units' to fewer temporary constructs and thus my 'themes' began to emerge. In order to document the way in which my reflections on the

‘constant comparisons’ that I was making changed and developed, I decided to use a different colour for each ‘re-read’ and associated reflective comments, in my triple entry journal. After this progressive refining, my themes emerged as: exhaustion, juggling, control/chaos, power/powerlessness, passion and enjoyment, feared possible selves, duty, perception of others, self-perception, gender, isolation/connection, freedom/entrapment, agency/passivity, emotion, materialism/appearance and inclusion of other eminent figures.

As others have outlined, (Whitty, 2002; Silverman, 2001) this ‘coding’ process is the most potentially problematic part of any constant comparative method. The very term, ‘coding’ is misleadingly suggestive of objectivity and scientific method, when the process of discerning themes and ideas from narrative data, is in fact highly subjective and interpretative. Silverman (2001) cites Atkinson’s identification that,

one of the disadvantages of coding schemes...is that because they are based upon a given set of categories, they furnish ‘a powerful conceptual grid from which it is difficult to escape. While this ‘grid’ is very helpful in organizing the data analysis, it also deflects attention away from uncategorized activities (Atkinson, 1992, cited in Silverman, 2001:123).

I found myself aware of this issue throughout my initial attempts to ‘categorise’ my data. There were elements of the participants’ stories which simply defied simplistic categorisation, or which sat uneasily between two ‘themes.’ Whitty (2002) captures the difficulty of any attempt to ‘code’ data yielded through a story-writing method: ‘The overriding impression was the complexity of the interwoven identities. It became a challenge to code the narratives without sacrificing too much of their richness’ (ibid: 219). In terms of this study, I felt

that the constant comparative method was a useful way of generating initial reflections and formulating workable groupings of data; however, the occasionally, reductive nature of coding detailed above was something I felt could only be mitigated by drawing upon my other analytical lenses e.g. literary analysis, which were able to restore some sense of appreciation for the 'wholeness' of the text to the process.

Finally, I looked at the possibility of using the NVivo computer software to aid my analysis. However, I felt that as a result of the relatively small amount of data that I was collecting and the methods that I was adopting, I did not see it as appropriate. Literary analysis and an exploration of narrative is an overtly subjective process involving a distinctly 'human' capacity.

Nothing, of course, substitutes for your intelligent reading of your data, and this to my mind is the main danger of software in qualitative data analysis: it leads you to the false belief that something else is going to do the hard work for you (Thomas 2009: 207).

3.4.4 Textual discursive analysis

The second 'textual analytic frame' employed by Wickens (2011) is 'textual discursive analysis' (Fairclough, 1995, 2003), which she identifies as being used: 'to indicate a specific analytic process connecting textual linguistic features with broader ideological perspectives and discourses' (Wickens, 2011:152). Similarly, I have engaged in a close linguistic analysis of the text, although the style and focus of my exploration are somewhat different to Wickens' use of Fairclough (1995, 2003).

Fairclough's (1995, 2003) approach is focused upon grammatical and semantic analysis. He defines 'textual analysis' for his purposes as: 'linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis' (Fairclough, 1995:185). Although if used in isolation, this approach could be accused of 'atomising' texts; when used in combination with other methods, as Fairclough (2003) advocates, 'Textual analysis should be used in conjunction with other methods of analysis,' (Fairclough, 2003: 15) it can add a vital layer of close analysis. Andrews et al. (2008) make reference to Derrida's warning that narrative researchers erroneously: 'pass over...narrative language to get to narrative 'meaning' or 'function' (Andrews et al., 2008: 9). A practice which might perhaps be engendered by 'close comparative methods' and a zealous approach to identifying 'meaning' with reference to underlying themes, but might be rectified to an extent with the 'slower and more attentive reading of narrative language' (Derrida, 1985, cited in Andrews et al., 2008:9), which may be demanded by a more detailed, 'textual discursive analysis.'

There are, however, a number of potential difficulties in applying 'textual discursive analysis.' Firstly, Fairclough (2003) admits that this style of linguistic analysis can, 'often be difficult for researchers without a background in linguistics' (Fairclough, 2003:6) and that the 'framework for text analysis has been forbiddingly technical and formalistic' (Fairclough, 1995:185). Indeed from my own perspective, there have been aspects of Fairclough's approach where, despite being an English teacher with some familiarity with linguistics, I have chosen to simplify, fearing that aspects of Fairclough's approach went beyond my level of competence or confidence. A further danger identified by Riessman (2002) is that, 'narrative analysis can reify linguistic structures'

(Riessman, 2002: 262), alerting us to the need to keep analysis rooted to context and demonstrating, again, the need for this style of analysis to be used alongside other ways of 'seeing'. Finally, although Fairclough (2003) critiques textual analysis as being 'inevitably selective' in terms of 'why are these questions being asked (of the text) rather than other questions?' and highlighting the dominant influence of the 'underlying motivation and world-view of the researcher' (Fairclough, 2003: 14), I feel this worry is of less concern when textual analysis is viewed as one of three analytical lenses; it becomes another subjective lens amongst many ways to view the data.

In terms of the practicalities of textual discursive method, Wickens (2011) chose to focus upon three major linguistic aspects: '1) grammatical structure, 2) attribution of word meaning, and (3) coded language,' (Wickens, 2011: 155) and more specifically in relation to grammatical structure: 'nominative and predicative phrasing, use of ellipses, descriptors, and word collocation (frequent word associations that cause them to appear synonymous' (Fairclough, 2003, cited in Wickens, 2011: 155). These were chosen on the basis that they were the most useful with regards to an analysis of power in LGBT themed fiction for teenagers; by, for example, allowing an analysis of the way in which collocations positioned the LGBT teen and their characteristics. In light of my research questions and limited expertise in linguistics, I chose to focus upon sentence structures, verb choices, use of figurative language and some aspects of intertextuality e.g. implicit references to other plot structures.

I found the use of the 'textual discursive' lens illuminating and refreshing. Due to the 'slowing down' which results inevitably from such a detailed, linguistic approach, I found myself looking at aspects of my data that had been neglected in a thematic exploration. A close exploration at word and sentence level frequently allowed me to 'step back' from assumptions I began to make and to look 'afresh' at the stories being told within the stories.

3.4.5 Literary analysis

The house of fiction is one of many dissimilar windows through which many pairs of eyes watch the same show but see many different things.
(Henry James, 1881, in Vandergrift, 1990:6).

In adopting literary analysis as one of my analytic frames, I am acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of interpreting fictions, as vividly captured in the Henry James' quotation above; this is not to dissolve literary analysis into complete relativism, but it is to acknowledge that the experience of sensitive reading, as long as evidenced in the text, brings multiple possibilities. Literary analysis, in the style that I have adopted, allowed me to restore the sense of textual wholeness, which may have been reduced in my thematic and linguistic analysis. Wickens (2011) sees the use of literary analysis as focusing upon: 'character, plot and thematic development,' (Wickens, 2011: 158) and takes particular note when reading and recording of: 'the introduction of new characters and significant narrative shifts' (ibid: 158). I have replicated this approach in terms of attention to character, plot and theme but have also broadened the range of narrative aspects to which I am drawing attention.

Wickens draws upon the style of 'New Criticism' (Crowe Ransom, 1941) adopted by Vandergrift (1990). To the extent that I have also focused initially upon a 'close reading' of the 'texts' themselves, including aspects of characterisation, setting, voices, point of view and figurative language, I too have drawn from some elements of 'New Criticism.' However, my style of literary criticism has also drawn upon elements of feminist criticism (Butler, 1990) and post-structuralist thought (Derrida, 1978; Butler, 1990; Walkerdine, 1990, 2001, 2003). A post-structuralist critical approach has involved my foregrounding the influence of my own positioning in terms of my 'reading' of the texts, as well as meaning that I have focused upon the text itself in the context of the society and influences in which it was produced, and have looked to bring these 'other voices' to the fore in my analysis. A further aspect of this style of literary analysis has led to my approaching the narratives with a readiness to explore the contradictions and inconsistencies; the parts which are not easily categorised: this is an approach which I see as invaluable in restoring some of the complexity which can be 'reduced' or glossed over when employing constant comparative or textual discursive methods. Finally, this stance has involved an attempt to interrogate the binary oppositions evident in the narratives themselves and seeing these as replicating a hegemonic social discourse, rather than being seen as 'neutral.'

Just as structuralist and post-structuralist thought seem at times to lie on a blurred continuum, so the style of literary analysis I have drawn on has at times appropriated a focus which may be seen more fittingly as part of a structuralist approach. I have also explored the narrative data with reference to, 'the 'limited stock of possible story lines' (Poletta 1998, in Andrews et al.

2008: 66). Making reference to Booker's '7 Basic Plots' (2004) has been useful in helping me to identify the genres and 'stock story lines' being drawn upon: an approach which undoubtedly owes more to structuralism than post-structuralism. Booker envisages seven archetypal plot-lines which underpin the fictions we construct: Tragedy, comedy, quest, overcoming the monster, voyage and return, rags to riches and re-birth. I found that this approach to literary analysis was useful in allowing me to make connections between the way in which participants were structuring their possible selves narratives and the types of 'plot-line', which surround them in media-portrayals of eminence.

Perhaps a final note regarding the use of literary analysis should be a cautious one. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004), Watson (2011) and Vandergrift (1990) all urge those using literary analysis to employ it as a useful 'lens' but to be tentative and grounded in making claims regarding conclusions that can be drawn. Vandergrift (1990) keeps the reader's mind firmly rooted to the idea that, 'All theories are fictions – much more tentative and imprecise than the fictions of story' (Vandergrift, 1990:1) highlighting that theory must remain merely a 'lens to examine the particular aspects of the literary work or the literary experience on which it sheds light,' and reminding us that from this we can only, 'make what meaning we can of what we see with that light' (ibid: 2). Similarly, Watson (2011) cites Whitebrook's critique of 'the tendency of researchers with an interest in literature to work with 'crude conceptions' of literary realism in which 'plot' is taken as an account that can be treated like a case study' (Whitebrook, 1993, cited in Watson, 2011: 402). With regards to these concerns over grandiose claims being made for the 'truth' or 'validity' of conclusions drawn through literary analysis, I hope that in drawing upon the

multiple analytic lenses employed by Wickens (2011), I am highlighting that each analytical frame is merely that: a frame providing an analytical perspective and striving to bring 'multiple narrative truths' to the fore, rather than making any pseudo-scientific claims. I am, I hope, 'tying strands together, intertwining ideas, weaving a fabric that is sometimes called 'theory' (Thomas, 2009: 233).

3.5 A story with complications, limitations and potential for re-telling and revision

There is inevitably a spectrum of limitations with any method of enquiry, some of which I have dealt with in the discussion of each approach or analytical lens, but the remainder of which I will explore here.

Perhaps most crucially, I must acknowledge the limitations placed upon my methodology by my own lack of experience and expertise. Lieblich et al., (1998) likens 'narrative research' to 'psychotherapy' in that it 'can be learned best via experience and supervision' (Lieblich et al., 1998: 11). I would add to this that, like psychotherapy, this is necessarily a slow process of gaining knowledge and one which I readily acknowledge I am just beginning. Similarly, my linguistic analysis in the style of Fairclough (2003) was inevitably limited by my lack of experience in working with more complex linguistic frameworks and I tended to rely more heavily upon my pre-existing familiarity with literary analysis. However, with both of these aspects I am mindful that the journey towards expertise must necessarily begin somewhere and that my EdD studies have acted as a catalyst towards greater knowledge of these fascinating approaches.

A second critique which could be levelled at this enquiry, is that perhaps my use of 'multiple textual analytic' frames suggests a 'triangulation' of approaches with the associated expectation that this will bring greater 'reliability', when in reality my use of multiple analytical approaches was more a means of juxtaposing multiple interpretations against one another in order to foreground the inevitably partial, mediated picture offered by each.

Thirdly, narrative methods can be open to critiques of 'anecdotalism'. Silverman (2001) defines this as the use of, 'a few telling examples of some apparent phenomenon, without any attempt to analyse less clear or contradictory data' (Silverman, 2001: 34). Silverman (2001) advocates the citation of 'deviant cases' in order to increase the confidence of the 'critical reader.' I would argue that, perhaps, by exposing the same data to more than one type of analysis and through a post-structural literary analysis, which draws attention to contradictions and tensions, this enquiry goes some way to counter this charge.

Finally, the study must acknowledge the extent to which the construction of the EdD study itself is inevitably altered in light of its author and anticipated audience. Silverman (2001) rightly cautions that we must, 'not forget how our own text has its own narrative structure, designed to persuade the reader that, confronted with any given textual fragment, 'we can see that', a favoured reading applies' (Silverman, 2001:126). Reissman echoes this warning in Huberman and Miles (2002) reminding the researcher of the limitation imposed by 'the anticipated response to the work,' in this case the university

board who decide on the validity, or otherwise, of an EdD project, as well as participants and head teacher, whose school has been involved:

The story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener (Riessman, 2002: 224).

3.6 Dénouement

Although in some ways the metaphor of 'dénouement' seems deceptively simple, it is also fitting in the way in which ultimately my multiple approaches did seem to intertwine with one another in a way which eventually allowed the emergence of 'single threads' of conclusion. My initial list of themes derived from the constant comparative analysis gradually narrowed when certain findings seemed to be supported more readily by the detailed 'micro-analysis' of a textual discursive approach and the broader holistic approach of my literary analysis. Ultimately, the findings which emerged most clearly and which I will discuss in Chapter 4 were: the thematic concern with the threat of isolation and the power of connection; the importance of maintaining 'femininity'; the presence/absence of female role models, mentors and other eminent women; gender rarely being explicitly explored; a tendency for participants to distance themselves from the possibility of future 'eminence'; exhaustion and the juggling of multiple roles and responsibilities; a range of oppositional tensions; the passion, enjoyment and 'flow' which a life of 'eminence' may bring; the co-existence of feared possible selves and the use of figurative language to reveal a suppressed discourse around eminence.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the findings that I have been able to draw from my narrative data. As outlined in the previous chapter, I have used three methods of analysis to explore my data: constant comparative analysis; literary analysis and textual discursive analysis. Here I have drawn together the findings from my three methods of exploring the data; the sub-headings are generally initially drawn from the themes emerging from my constant comparative analysis, which I then thicken and develop with reference to my additional analytical lenses.

4.2 The participants' narratives

In order to contextualise the data as it is discussed in this chapter, I will briefly outline the content and direction of each participant's narrative holistically, before synthesising various elements from each narrative in order to reach more general findings. This summary is necessarily partial for the sake of brevity; the complete narratives can be found in Appendix 2.

Joan

Joan describes a day as a 'boss' at a 'financial office' in New York. She details a day which moves from a description of her material wealth, into a dramatic episode of being trapped in, and subsequently rescued from, a lift in her workplace, and finally detailing a more philanthropic aspect of her life as an eminent woman.

Nijo

Nijo details a life which revolves around family and materialistic concerns. It is largely descriptive rather than narrative and makes general points about the day to day life of this future 'eminent' woman. Interestingly, in this narrative there is little or no sense of what has led to the narrator's eminence nor any real engagement with the idea of career aside from some vague sense of the narrator's status as the owner of a 'surgery' or 'dental practice' which would preferably be a 'private clinic.'

Isabella

The overriding impression conveyed by Isabella's narrative is one of busyness and time pressure. She details a day working as an eminent designer, with a clear sense that there are demands upon her time in this role based upon the position she has reached. The narrative also details meetings with friends for lunch and dinner and a little of her domestic sphere at the beginning and end of each day.

Winn

Winn has a clear sense of the demands that she would meet facing life as an eminent neurosurgeon. The narrative details the considerable challenges, both physical and mental which she imagines she might face. Few other people emerge as figures in the text, aside from brief mention of other famous eminent figures, Steve Jobs and Albert Einstein, whose quotations our narrator applies as wisdom for her own life.

Marlene

Marlene details life as a successful, future Head teacher. She describes having 'waded' through the years of classroom teaching in order to finally achieve the 'top job.' She details a range of tasks within her day, including meetings, presentations, work on the school budget and reading students' reports.

Angie

Angie describes the varied and exciting imagined life of a future film director. The narrative goes beyond the scope of the original prompt by providing some details of the narrator's journey to the point of 'eminence', from early scheduled trips to the cinema to the narrator's film degree.

Kit

Kit describes her life as an eminent 'Youtuber' and owner of an online business. Strikingly, she ignores the written prompt to imagine a day in 'your life in the future' and constructs her narrative in the third person. The tone of the narrative is largely positive, despite the fact that there appear to be no other significant people in the narrator's life, aside from her online 'followers' and her dog.

Jeanine

Jeanine describes, in general overview, the life of 'an eminent historical researcher.' The piece describes different elements of the job, including the

potential problems and difficulties, but does so in a detached, factual style.

There are a range of specific details given in relation to the imagined job, but nothing of the personal realm and little relating to feeling.

Louise

Louise begins in a state of exhaustion, waking in a hotel room. The narrative goes on to describe the poet's observation of a small girl on the street below, followed by writing a poem about her experience. She describes the journey to, and subsequent experience of attending, an awards ceremony honouring her writing. The piece concludes with the narrator reading a personally meaningful poem at the ceremony and being overwhelmed, and relieved, by the reaction of the audience. The narrative employs a blend of poetry and prose.

Shona

Shona details life as an eminent graphic designer. The narrative describes the process of working on a design brief and the challenges which this brings.

This episode is concluded by a muted success for the narrator and the introduction of the idea that the narrator has been asked to, 'act as the main judge on the panel' of 'The National Sustainable Design Challenge.' The whole piece concludes on a conflicted note, with the narrator describing her state as being torn between enjoying the work and feeling like she will not, 'have the capacity to carry on' as she 'gets older.'

4.3 Participants drew upon inter-textual elements and familiar narrative

tropes in constructing the lives of eminent women.

As outlined in my description of this project's conceptual underpinning in 1.6.2, a post-structural stance involves a foregrounding of the 'inter-textuality' or relationship between one text and another. In looking at my data, I drew on the 'possible selves' studies cited in Chapter 2 (2.5.4) which explore participants' narratives as being textured through their interaction with other texts (Zannettino, 2008; Walkerdine, 1984). I analysed each of the narratives with reference to Booker's '7 Basic plot' structures (see 3.4.5), looking for any predominant narrative patterns and the extent to which the archetypal plot structures chosen could illuminate further elements of the participants' perceptions of future eminence. In this section, I will discuss each participant's narrative structure in sequence in order to maintain a sense of the 'wholeness' of each narrative.

Joan

The overall structure of the narrative seems to adhere to a 'rags to riches' plotline. The narrative emphasises that the narrator began as 'merely' a student at school and ends with, 'I believe I have been very successful in my career. I have got to where I want to be. I've got the job I wanted and through this job, to be. I've got the job I wanted and through this job, I'm able to make money to be able to be put to good use.' However, like the 'rags to riches' archetype the narrative seems to suggest a 'false ending' before the 'happily ever after' conclusion. The narrator's initial concentration on wealth and materialism and this form of success seem to lead towards her entrapment in the lift where 'everything suddenly goes wrong.' Following this episode, the

narrative shifts towards a concentration upon the narrator's charity work and the sharing of wealth and the tone moves to being more assured and positive, concluding with an acknowledgement of her remarkable achievement, 'I might be the first woman to have this kind of high role.' There is the sense that by the end of the narrative the narrator has moved from having a simplistic material sense of what 'eminence' means to a fuller conception of what it might mean to lead a fulfilled life as an 'eminent' woman.

Nijo

The piece seems to adhere to elements of a 'rags to riches' tale; however, there is some sense that the narrative is unfinished. In contrast to Joan, there is no 'false ending' followed by renewed understanding and greater fulfilment. Perhaps there is instead the feeling that this narrative represents the early part of a rags to riches tale, where the narrator has experienced initial success but the ending does not suggest 'a happily ever after'; the narrative ends with 'And that's really it.' Where the tone is anticlimactic rather than triumphant and leaves the reader with the suggestion that there is something missing or some sense of compromise for the narrator in the final evaluation of her success.

Isabella

The structure of the narrative suggests Booker's (2004) 'quest' plot, particularly in the sense that the narrative typically revolves around a group rather than a single protagonist, and here we get the idea that our narrator is part of a group of 'high achieving women.' She has clearly accepted 'the call' to 'eminence' in her field and within this account we sense that she is on 'the journey' but that her quest continues. The close of the narrative leaves us with

the idea that the 'hero' has not yet 'won it all' and there is not yet the sense of 'an assurance of renewed life stretching indefinitely into the future,' rather the suggestion is of potential 'frustration' and 'temptation' as the 'quest' continues.

Winn

The text resembles Booker's (2004) 'overcoming the monster' trope, with the feeling that the aggressor being battled is nameless, faceless and potentially an internal saboteur for the narrator, hence the high degree of control, scheduling and activity needed to ward away the spectre of one's life feeling 'disjointed and confusing' when there is no 'distinction between work and free time.'

Marlene

In terms of narrative structure, there is an implication that this narrative has some of the traits of a 'quest' or 'voyage and return' trope. The narrator certainly seems immersed in the world of her workplace; there is also the idea that she is in a process of continual growth and increasing self-knowledge. The narrative ends, however, with a tone of resignation: 'Another day gone, and another day tomorrow,' which signposts no immediate sense of 'return' or 'rebirth.'

Angie

The narrative seems closest to a 'rags to riches' narrative whereby the years of study and patience detailed at the outset result in the considerable enjoyment and reward of the narrator's current positions where 'no two days are the same' and she can feel assured that, 'this is what makes me happy.'

Kit

There is perhaps some sense of a kind of 'rags to riches' narrative in Kit's account; there is the suggestion perhaps that the 'darker forces' that have initially held her back, might have been a lack of connection to others, something which she has overcome through the development of her online self. This idea is supported in her acknowledgement that following her meeting with her fans she feels 'accepted' which carries with it the idea that this is a novelty for the narrator. The narrative depicts the narrator overcoming the obstacle presented by her own disorganization and manages to attend the gathering of her fans in time, she must also gather herself together sufficiently to address her fans, which she demonstrates takes effort, 'Take deep breaths....1,...2...1...2... - She walks slowly to her spot as many eyes followed her.' Perhaps here there is the sense that these moments are also part of the narrator gaining greater maturity and insight, again evident in a 'rags to riches' plotline.

Jeanine

There is some sense that the narrator is engaged in an 'overcoming the monster' plotline, whereby the 'other people' which she envisages as an antagonistic force need to be 'overcome' or 'conquered' in order to truly prevail. The narrative, if read in this light, remains unfinished; the narrator is at the 'frustration' stage of her journey whereby the 'monster' remains an active threat to her future success and confidence.

Louise

Finally, in terms of the structure of the narrative, the plot seems to draw upon elements of the 'voyage and Return' and 're-birth' plot-lines (Booker, 2004). The traditional 'voyage and return' begins with the protagonist in a state of abnormality e.g. having suffered from a blow to the head or being on the verge of sleep; when the character awakes they are in a different reality. This could correspond with the drowsy, awakening and jet lagged state of the poet in the narrative. Similarly, in a 'voyage and return' story, the next stage is the experience of the 'dream world' where things seem puzzling and strange, as the poet's experience of watching the little girl and balloon. The mood of the story starts to darken as the poet leaves the hotel and there is something somewhat sinister in her encounter with the 'hound' like man with 'black eyes.' However, the narrative's close is more akin to a 're-birth tale' than the 'voyage and return' trope; the narrator does not 'return' with little change, but instead her reading of her deeply personal poem within the public sphere, and the tears experienced as a result of the audience's response, seem to signal a significant shift towards, potentially, a new more integrated sense of self.

Shona

Finally, this text seems to draw upon elements of the 'overcoming the monster' and 'quest' narratives. The 'monster' could be viewed as 'the company' and 'client' or the narrator's career itself, with the demands that she 'battle' and 'conquer.' The 'nightmare stage' is evident in the 'horrendous' night's sleep and torturous creative process, 'swamped with half formed ideas' which is finally overcome in 'hour five' with the development of an 'overall theme and colour scheme.' The tale is completed with the narrator's reward of 'riches': 'The National Sustainable Design Challenge is coming up and the board of

organisers would like me to make a speech and to act as the main judge.'

However, the narrative differs in that there is very little sense of life concluding 'happily ever after'; there is a greater sense that a new, ongoing 'quest' narrative has begun with another 'ordeal' to be overcome in the shape of the public speaking to come.

4.4 The threat of isolation/the power of connection

Through a literary analysis, which explored the characterisation within the narratives, I began to examine the participants' depiction of 'eminent women' as isolated and the powerful and positive emphasis placed upon 'connection' where it was present. In part, the powerful sense of isolation envisaged as part of an 'eminent' life perhaps echoes the current reality that for a woman to rise to a position of eminence continues to situate her within a very small minority (see 2.3) which brings inevitable isolation as well as the pragmatic recognition that the very derivation of 'eminence' from 'eminere' (to stand out) will always carry connotations of being apart from and separate to the 'crowd.'

For Marlene, the most dominant impression of the imagined life of a future Head teacher was of isolation. The narrator describes that, 'despite being surrounded by over 1000 people everyday it can seem like a very lonely job.' She goes on to describe that the 'Students have their friends' and the 'teachers themselves have others in their position with whom to gossip' which leaves her with few allies, although the narrative does subsequently describe her working with others within the school, 'to meet with the deputy heads to discuss our focuses for the next half term.' Discussion of her own level of isolation, alongside the need for the school to have an authority figure, leads

her to conclude that, 'to succeed you sometimes have to sacrifice.' This initially moderate and perhaps realistic conclusion, however becomes more negative in her next assertion that, 'I definitely believe that sometimes positions of eminence can lack satisfaction.' The reader gets the sense that as the writer continues to develop her ideas, she becomes more and more negative towards her imagined future eminence, becoming overwhelmed by the threat of isolation and rejection from those around her, before returning to a more optimistic note, 'It sounds like I'm making it out to be the worst job ever and yet there are good things.' There is a resonance here with the discussion of 'normative gender roles' (2.3.9) and the suggestion that the isolation and rejection expected by Marlene could be in keeping with the 'punishments for role incongruity' imagined by Diekman and Eagly (Cited in Brown et al., 2010: 569).

Although generally less negative, in Kit's narrative we see the narrator alone apart from online interaction or interactions with people who have initially been contacted through an online source. There is a marked contrast between the narrator's virtual connections with '2,000,000 subscribers on Youtube' and the 'hundreds of comments' which appear instantly on her Facebook page and her real world connection which appears to be only as 'She pets her dog' on having returned home. However, there is little sense of loneliness or misery; the narrator sounds gratified and fulfilled with her existence and she ends the narrative by 'looking forward to the next day.'

For Jeanine, the absence of other specific people seems to underline the narrator's assertion that the job will be 'quite a solitary thing.' Aside from the

brief mention that she 'hopes that friendships will be formed,' the mention of others seems to bring difficulty and challenge. In the first paragraph, the narrator considers if she were to, 'have children.' She makes clear that this would present a 'great dilemma' in terms of providing childcare and continuing with a career. The only other people alluded to in the narrative are a faceless group of 'directors and/or writers' whom she would work with. Interestingly, the narrator imagines encounters with this group might be: 'difficult to make myself heard', that she, 'will not always be listened to,' and that despite her status as an eminent woman she, 'will not be the most important voice and may, at times be ignored.' Finally, close to the conclusion of the narrative she imagines that 'I will have to work with people that I do not get along with.' The antagonistic force in this narrator's journey as an eminent woman seems to be 'other people.'

Brown et al. (2010) and Lips' (2004) findings that women are more likely than men to envisage future inter-personal problems if imagining themselves in leadership roles seem to be borne out by the participants' narratives. Perhaps we need to understand this anticipation of isolation and a lack of inter-personal connection in light of Read et al's (2011) discussion of the construction of 'self-identity...defined through 'boundary work' – constructed notions of similarity and difference to other selves' (Jenkins, 1996; Reay, 2010, cited in Read et al., 2011: 171). As the narratives only cite examples of men in eminent positions, perhaps the construction of an imagined 'self' as an isolated, eminent woman becomes understandable; all that can be imagined is 'difference' to other selves, as the only other eminent selves they imagine are men. Read et al. (2011) clarify that, 'identities need to be validated by others

to be successful' (171) and perhaps when 'popularity is ...often based on the need to be perceived as 'nice', or being the passive 'good girl' (Merten, 1997; Bettis and Adams, 2003; Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2007, cited in Read et al., 2011: 171), then the expectation that life as an 'eminent' woman, with the implication that one 'stands out' and is therefore likely to transgress the 'dominant discourses concerning socially/culturally appropriate masculinity and femininity,' (ibid: 172) will lead to 'isolation' or limited social connection seems to make more sense.

4.5 Maintaining femininity is important to the lives of eminent women.

In 2.4.3, I outline the difficulties for the high-achieving girl in attempting to construct a 'unitary sense of self': she must navigate the demands upon her to achieve as the ideal neo-liberal subject, whilst balancing the performance of her femininity. In Francis et al. (2009), they cite McRobbie's description that:

Girls are compelled to perform a 'post-feminist masquerade', wherein young women must perform hyper-femininity and submissiveness if they are to simultaneously take up traditionally masculine aspects of performance that denote 'success' in education and career, and that they do not jeopardise their 'heterosexual desirability'. (McRobbie, 2007, cited in Francis et al., 2009: 10)

A number of the narratives in the study describe this 'performance' of femininity as important to their imagined life as an eminent woman. This sense of 'balancing' their 'femininity' alongside their achievements is particularly conveyed through the narratives of Nijo and Kit. Nijo foregrounds concerns about her appearance and femininity in her opening paragraph, prior to detailing the career which she imagines has enabled her 'eminence': 'This will

sound shallow but I want to be a decently attractive person, hopefully I haven't gained any weight, even after having children.' She goes on to describe the way in which her 'large beautifully designed house' would enable her focus on the aesthetic with an 'ensuite bathroom and walk in wardrobe.' Joan also details herself as being 'suited up as usual' and lest we should think this too simple or unconcerned by fashion, then specifies that it is her, 'very expensive designer suit.' Interestingly, Louise's narrative seems to separate the 'self' who is alone in her hotel room with 'clothes strewn across her floor' and who 'curls up on the bed with a collection of TS Eliot' from the public self who will address a crowd, wearing the 'high heels' that are waiting 'by the door.' In this narrative, the 'performance' of hyper-femininity is for the public. This is furthered by the description that as she leaves the hotel lobby she finds that, 'my shirt and skirt were not thick enough to withstand the November chill.' There seems to be something symbolic regarding feeling exposed or unprotected here.

Kit details that, 'Beside her bed, on the desk, was her laptop, many brushes and make up and hair bands.' Initially, the description seems to visually depict the juxtaposition of the objects relating to two aspects of her self-hood: those which ensure her performance of 'femininity': 'make up', 'hair' and those which are associated with her achievement, 'desk', 'laptop.' There is also the possibility that these details represent a straddling of the adult and child worlds, representing the perspective of the teenage girl envisaging the adult's self: the present self and the possible future self. Kit's narrative has perhaps found a means of maintaining a more unified sense of self through basing her 'eminence' upon the success of her performance of femininity: her online

business and 'YouTube' status revolve around her abilities with hair and make-up, thus meaning she sidesteps the risk of her achievements 'jeopardising' her 'heterosexual desirability,' (Francis et al., 2009: 10) by fusing success with feminine aesthetics and career achievement.

A tentative conclusion from this data might lead us to suggest that the participants in this study were, like the high achieving primary aged girls in Renold et al's (2006) study, aware of the complexities surrounding successfully 'doing girl' and the need to negotiate 'the competing demands of changing modes of femininity and achievement' (ibid: 470).

4.6 Female role models, mentors and other eminent women are entirely absent

In 2.2, I discuss the dearth of literature on 'eminent' women in the public domain and this seems to be mirrored within the participants' depiction of other 'eminent figures' in their narratives. Through my constant comparative analysis, I noticed the number of 'eminent' male figures cited throughout the narratives. Winn invokes advice from Steve Jobs, 'Steve Jobs once said that you should never settle for a job because you will never try your best at something you do not like,' and Einstein who, 'said that we are what we repeatedly do and as a consequence excellence is a habit.' Similarly, Angie mentions admired directors 'like Brian Singer, Ang Li, and David Heyman' and composers 'Hans Zimmer or James Newton Howard.' All of the eminent figures mentioned are male; even the imaginary eminent figure cited by Louise, 'I turned to the man on my left. Chairman of the American Literary Association and founding member of dozens of literary prizes,' is a man.

Unlike Louise and Winn, Angie does 'notice the unfairness' in the gendered situation she describes and also sees herself as part of the solution, 'I thought, 'I can change that,' seeming to counter the 'post-feminist' argument which means that girls and women are depicted as no longer 'needing' or 'wanting' feminism (McRobbie, 2004, 2009, cited in Pomerantz and Raby, 2011). The dearth of other eminent women in the narratives also seems to support Wellington's (2001) concern regarding the paucity of female mentors in the workplace.

4.7 Gender was rarely explored explicitly

In 2.3.6 I discuss the rise of a 'Post-feminist' discourse which refuses to acknowledge gender disparity or to own the continued need for feminist struggle. When coupled with the rhetoric of Neo-liberalism (see 2.4.4) with its emphasis upon the individual, we perhaps begin to point towards an explanation for the fact that the participants' narratives very rarely explicitly acknowledge gender as a concern in their lives as future 'eminent' women. The exceptions to this were Angie and Louise. As previously mentioned, Angie responds positively and proactively towards the lack of gender equality, which she perceives, feeling confident that she can change the situation faced. Furthermore, in terms of her film career the narrator eschews the gender stereotyped choices of, 'comedy and romance' which 'never interested' her, in favour of 'Superheroes, Aliens, Robots, Elves, Centaurs, Wizards.' There is the potential for this to give us some indication of the narrator's motivation: to achieve something, which challenges gender stereotypes. It could also be connected to the participant's age and level of maturity.

In terms of a gendered reading of Louise's text, it is interesting that the poet is a silent listener with the 'man' in the car. It is also notable that the 'chairman of the American Literary Association' is imagined as male. Perhaps symbolically though, alongside her 'picturing' the man through poetry, her poetry and status also allow her to 'replace him at the lectern' and to find her voice, culminating in sharing her poetry with a larger audience.

The fact that these are the only explicit references to gender seems to reinforce the sense that these young women have been influenced by an increasingly 'post-feminist' discourse (see 2.3.6) which denies the possibility of continued inequality, whether subtle or overt, with reference to gender.

4.8 Some participants distanced themselves from embodying an eminent 'possible self.'

The written prompt given to the participants asked them to imagine *themselves* as a future eminent woman and to describe a day in their future lives. Possible selves studies have cited the benefits of envisaging one's future success in this manner (Leondari et al., 1998; Greene and Debacker, 2004; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007). However, interestingly a number of participants used a range of methods to distance themselves from the 'inhabitation' of an eminent possible self.

Most overtly, in terms of distancing, Kit ignores the written prompt to 'write about a day in the life of your future eminent self' and chooses to write in the third person, implying a level of dissociation from a future identity as an eminent woman. I wondered if this could have been the result of the

participant 'defaulting' to the mode of writing which they are most used to and while writing in the third person is the norm for analytical writing at key stage three and four, there is no such prescription for creative or descriptive writing. A further sense of distancing in Kit's narrative is the lack of interior life; we learn that 'without a warning, she felt her eyes get moist' and that she needed to 'Take deep breaths' prior to meeting her audience, but these details are followed by a listing of her actions, 'she thanked each person and took pictures with them,' rather than any further reflection, ensuring that the writer remains 'outside' the experience of an imagined eminent woman.

Winn also manages to create a degree of distance, despite adhering to the prompt to write a first-person narrative. In the second paragraph of her narrative, she writes in an elliptical form, omitting the subject 'I' from her sentences: 'Wake up at three, leave the house by four,' 'Cycle to the hospital everyday...' The omission of subject gives the sentences an imperative mood, leading to a reading, which suggests that these are more like note-form instructions to herself regarding what she will need to do to achieve success rather than a 'description' of an imagined life. An alternative reading might suggest choosing to omit 'I' from these statements could imply the participant finds it difficult to actually imagine this as a realistic, 'owned' future. This reading could be furthered with reference to her use of the second person: 'When you find your passion and commit yourself to it, you will perform,' which although seemingly written as advice from the 'eminent' narrator to others following in her footsteps, with the implication that she has found her 'passion' and is 'performing' highly, could easily also be read as another example of the narrator negating her ownership of her imagined high-performance and

drawing on the advice of an eminent 'man', in this case 'Steve Jobs,' rather than imagining that her own future eminence might put her in a position to act as an advice-giver.

Nijo and Jeanine write largely in the subjunctive mood, suggesting a distancing from the 'definite' eminent future they were asked to imagine. Nijo uses, 'Hopefully, I haven't...', 'It will either be...' and Jeanine 'hopes' that 'friendships will be formed' or that 'occasionally I may...' have to 'write down my findings.' Nijo and Jeanine, like Kit, have also ignored elements of the written prompt they were given; rather than writing about a specific day in their imagined life, they have written in more general terms. For both participants this allows them to explore possibilities: 'I think that I will be requested to work on a project with people or that I will be assigned to more important projects' (Jeanine), 'When my children are young, we will definitely go to Disneyland because I love that place,' (Nijo) rather than embody an 'eminent' possible self in a more tangible, 'lived' sense.

Finally, Joan and Shona both adopt an ironic tone, constructing, at times, an almost parodic version of an 'eminent' woman. Joan concludes her second paragraph with the decision to, 'take my Porsche to work today,' which when coupled with the causal clause that follows, 'as my Ferrari needs to be washed,' becomes potentially hyperbolic, indicative of an ironic approach. This could again be interpreted as a form of distancing for this participant from a serious consideration of the realities of an eminent life. Similarly, there is a potentially ironic distancing from an eminent identity in the first clause of

Shona's sentence: 'Being the consummate designer I am, I was very willing to work through the night to meet the deadline...'

The multiple methods of 'distancing' engaged in by the participants seems to once again echo the findings of Renold et al's (2006) research in the primary school classroom. The girls in Renold et al's study were aware of the need to 'minimise any threat' which the identity of a 'high achiever' might 'pose to ...boys, ...girl friendships and ultimately, ...femininity' (2006: 469) and we might suggest that participants in this study were keen to put a safe distance between themselves and an imagined, eminent future, deeming the latter to be perhaps too threatening or precarious a position for them to comfortably or confidently inhabit.

4.9 Life as an eminent woman would be exhausting

In section 2.3.8, I explore the 'Opt-Out' literature which details the experiences of women who have made it to the highest echelons of their chosen careers but who subsequently 'opt-out' to devote themselves to family, volunteering or to adopt less high-ranking roles. In many of these women's stories they talk about the 'extreme pressures' and 'competing demands' which ultimately left them exhausted and led to their seeking alternative ways of living their lives. Again, the participants' narratives seem to pre-empt the experiences of the 'Opt-Out' narratives. One of the themes to emerge most prominently from my initial constant comparative analysis was the sense that the imagined life of an eminent woman would be an exhausting one, both physically and mentally. 'Sleep deprivation' (Winn and Louise); poor sleeping (Isabella and Shona); 'mountains of work' (Joan) and long hours 'eighteen hour shift' (Winn), 'work

through the night to meet the deadline' (Shona), 'Finally, I would leave my workplace at around eight o'clock,' (Isabella) all alerted me to the prevalence of this theme within the narratives.

This finding was further illustrated through my literary analysis where I found much of the language used constructs the sense that the narrators' lives are filled with time constraints. In Isabella's first paragraph, we learn that she wakes up 'not feeling refreshed from the night's sleep' due to the 'busy' and 'exhausting' previous day. The narrative continues to emphasise the idea that many of her activities involve multi-tasking: 'During the walk to the office' she has to 'eat on the go'; as she arrives she has 'five minutes to eat her breakfast and check her emails'; even her lunch break with a friend is used to 'catch up on any news we had missed.' Although the narrator acknowledges there are some aspects of her work, which she finds, 'long and mentally draining', she also expresses enjoyment in producing 'new and unique ideas' with colleagues. There is the strong sense that the narrative links the idea of the narrator's eminence with having little time and space for anything aside from work, perhaps echoing the media portrayal of the 'burn-out' associated with attempting to 'have it all' (Meyer et al., 2011).

Similarly, in Winn's narrative although she assures the reader that her 'work is her passion' and she is 'assuredly' not complaining, there is a sense that the demands upon her time are relentless and inescapable. She wakes 'with bags under her eyes' as a result of rising 'day in day out' at 3 a.m., meaning that 'sleep deprivation' is one of the things which she cannot 'escape from.' Her 'work and attention is in constant demand' and consequently, she has 'little

time for anything else.’ There is no sense that this is a situation that the narrator feels that she is in any way able to alter the external reality of; the only control she sees herself as being able to exert is over her own ‘balance’ of work and other goals, again underlining many of the conclusions drawn by the writers and thinkers discussed in the literature review on ‘Neo-Liberalism and its impact’ (see 2.4.4).

Perhaps most strikingly Shona’s narrative depicts life as an eminent designer as both consuming and exhausting. The narrator describes, ‘drifting in and out of the confusing whirl of letters and pictures inside my head’ evoking a sense of chaos, which is supported as the narrative continues with the description of being, ‘at a loss’ and ‘swamped with half-formed ideas and garish colours and typography too inconsistent with anything to be appropriate.’ When coupled with the idea that the narrator has just woken from a ‘terrible sleep’, these descriptions have a nightmarish quality; the narrator seems unable to exert control and the implication is that the ‘chaos’ has a frightening aspect. There is also something somewhat frightening about the sense that ‘graphic design’ is all-consuming: ‘Design is my life, everything outside it, and everything that makes up the fabric of my existence.’ The narrator continues to emphasise the sense that her work is ‘inescapable’: ‘I go to sleep in the small hours of the morning thinking about how unsuccessful my last design was, and I wake up thinking it even more,’ lending a claustrophobic feeling to the life being described.

A textual discursive analysis also highlighted the importance of this theme. The use of time adverbials dominate: ‘Half an hour later...’, ‘a ten minute

walk'. 'at six o'clock...' showing a constant preoccupation with the scarcity of time and need for precise scheduling. Interestingly in Isabella's narrative, where the indicative mood generally prevails, the subjunctive mood is only used in discussion of the narrator's free time, 'I might do some internet shopping before going to bed.' The definite realm is that defined by the unrelenting work schedule; the area of the possible is the time spent away from work, bringing the suggestion that should the exhaustion or demands of the job be too great, the outside realm that is merely possibility or hope will be side lined in favour of the demands of work.

There is much in these narratives of exhaustion and unrelenting work demand which chime with the tendency to 'individualise' difficulties as part of a broader neo-liberal discourse, as highlighted by Ringrose (2007), Pomerantz and Raby (2011) and Walkerdine (2001). In all the descriptions of '3 am' waking, '18 hour shifts' or 'sleep deprivation', there is no critique of the systems or roles which would demand this from these 'eminent' women. None of the narratives suggest any possibility of changing the structures around them that mean they are leading such exhausting lives, nor do any of them offer any critique, aside from a suggestion that their own scheduling and control might need to be more rigid. This echoes Pomerantz and Raby's (2011) suggestion that the individualistic ideology of neo-liberalism leads to difficulties in the workplace being internalised, 'rather than collectively challenged as institutional acts of oppression' (2011: 561). However, there was a lone narrative which envisaged a different way of working, '10:00 am....On a summer morning, she wakes up, stretches and turns around to look at the time...she yawns and falls back into her bed.' Kit describes a self-directed schedule as an 'eminent' 'You Tuber

and the owner of an online shop.’ She depicts working from home, maintaining her own hours and her narrative is uniquely split between detailing aspects of her ‘self’ in the domestic and work sphere. Kit’s narrative eschews the pressured, time constrained picture presented by the other participants in favour of a working life which echoes much of what is sought after by women in the ‘Opt-Out’ literature (Belkin, 2003; Stone, 2007; Hewlett, 2007) or advocated by those who see the need for flexible, different ways of working as crucial to real gender equality in an on-line age.

4.10 Eminence requires considerable juggling of multiple roles and responsibilities

A number of the existing ‘possible selves’ studies surveyed in 2.5 have highlighted the ‘gendered’ patterns in envisaging competing demands upon time in the future. In their ‘possible selves’ study, Greene and Debacker (2004) found that men tended to imagine their future selves experiencing a more even distribution of events and goal fulfillment across their lifetime; men also envisaged the pursuit of fewer future goals. The opposite was true for women. Through the constant comparative analysis of my data, the sense that the participants in the study imagined enacting multiple roles and dividing their time between a range of projects and people, emerged strongly thus seeming to support the findings of Greene and Debacker (2004), albeit in a study which only looks at a single gender.

The participants imagined a range of roles and responsibilities beyond their eminent careers. Whether it was maintaining a busy social life with a sense of enjoyment: ‘so I could dine with a group of friends who also have high-

achieving careers' (Isabella) or a suggestion of duty: 'I think I will have time to see my family and friends often enough to maintain good relationships' (Jeanine). They highlighted the need to maintain a 'balance between your work life and social life' (Joan) and that it is 'very important to have balance, to have other goals, other hobbies' (Winn) alongside the demands of maintaining 'a very healthy life' and doing 'some exercises in the house' and jogging 'around the near by park' (Kit).

Joan's narrative imagined the greatest number of competing roles and was therefore the most in keeping with Greene and Debacker's (2004) findings. Joan describes life as a 'high class business woman' who also 'opened her own charity' where she takes a 'hands-on' role, 'After a busy day at the office, I head down to my other business,' which she highlights as being challenging, 'It's hard work running a charity. But it's even harder when you also have a business to look after.' This is all before she drives home, 'so that I'll be in time to pick the kids up from school.' This seems to echo the conclusion that: 'In general, female students imagined their futures in terms of combinations of higher education, career, family and leisure activities, whereas male students imagined only one or two pursuits for their futures' (Greene and Debacker, 2004: 104-5).

Literary analysis of Nijo's narrative revealed a similar depiction of multiple competing demands. There is the sense within the narrative that the narrator envisages a successful life as being a precise and precarious balancing act, necessitating a high level of control. She specifies that her children will attend a 'private or religious primary school.' She imagines a narrow window in which

she would have children, 'By 35, my oldest child should be no older than 9 and no younger than 7' and for when she might marry, 'no younger than 24, no older than 28.' Her level of envisaged control also directs the autonomy of her future children, 'I would like all my children to be Drs whether that be a doctor, dentist or obtaining a PhD' and her happiness before marriage is dependent upon achieving the balance between 'having a relationship before I settle' but 'not being in a relationship constantly.' In this way, Nijo's narrative seems to come closest to demonstrating an adherence to the 'sex role prescriptions and other norms and expectations that mark the particular context in which one lives' described by Greene and Debacker (2004:115).

Brown et al. (2010) and Fetterolf and Eagly's (2011) findings regarding the disciplining nature of gendered expectation and the narrative of 'intensive mothering' also feel relevant regarding the participants' perception of the juggling which their future lives might entail. Joan confides that, 'To be honest, I felt guilty about how little time I had spent with my husband and children,' perhaps echoing some of the feelings highlighted by the 'Opt-Out' literature: 'Hewlett (2007) found that 44% of a sample of women with undergraduate honors or advanced degrees who had voluntarily left their jobs at some point...cited having more time for their children as a reason for the departure' (cited in Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011: 84). Jeanine expresses a similar feeling, yet more emphatically:

The thing I think will be difficult concerning my home life is if I ever have children. I would not wish for someone else to look after them but also, would not wish to give up my job, so at this point, I would face a great dilemma.

This quotation comes from the first paragraph of Jeanine's narrative foregrounding her awareness of this classic double-bind, which is described again and again within the 'Opt-Out' literature (Belkin, 2003; Stone, 2007; Hewlett, 2007). It could also be seen to support Gorman and Fritzsche's (2002) emphasis upon the prevalent, media attachment to the narrative of 'intensive mothering' which positions the 'stay-at-home' mother as 'good' and the working mother of young children as 'less communal and more selfish' (Bridges and Etaugh, 1995 cited in Fetterolf and Eagly, 2011: 84). Interestingly, the suggestion in Jeanine's statement is that she would be entirely responsible for managing the juggling of work and family life or of absenting herself from the world of work; the 'dilemma' would be hers to face alone, rather than any suggestion that her partner might share responsibility. The 'rewards for role congruity and punishments for role incongruity' (Diekman and Eagly, 2008, cited in Brown et al. 2010: 569) are also evident in the way in which Nijo describes her status as 'quite a strict parent in terms of homework and cleaning' and more markedly in the way in which Shona seems to defend herself against an imagined critique: 'Nothing on the kids front (yet), but it's early days and we don't want to be tied down with more than we can cope with,' as though reassuring the reader that even though she might not currently be conforming to a social norm, she expects to do so in future.

However, although many of the participants anticipated multiple roles and the need to juggle responsibilities, there was also a sense that they were willing to accept compromise. Whilst discussion of child-care seemed to carry a degree of judgment and expectation, participants did not expect so much of themselves in other aspects of domestic life: 'none of us have time to cook'

(Isabella), 'I can see myself using the microwave a lot where meals are concerned' (Winn) and none of the participants described any household chores as part of their day, perhaps concurring with Fetterolf and Eagly's (2011) finding that the female participants in their 'possible selves' study were optimistic that 'their possible self would undertake only a moderate amount of domestic work' (2011: 91). Perhaps there is a wishful optimism in this perspective which does not however recognise the continued imbalance in household responsibility captured by Hochschild's (1989) definition of the 'second shift.'

4.11 The narratives depict a tension between: chaos and control; power and powerlessness; agency and passivity; autonomy and dependence; public and private

Read et al. (2011) argue that the presentation of a 'single authentic self' is difficult for girls in light of the 'contradictory impossibilities of contemporary dominant discourses of femininity' (2011:181). In keeping with my post-structural positioning, with its inherent interest in deconstruction, I was interested by the number of participants in this study who seemed to depict their future lives as being constructed around contradictory impulses: between chaos and control; power and powerlessness; agency and passivity and autonomy and dependence, perhaps reflecting the confused 'interplay between embodying and performing normative 'femininity' and high achievement' (Renold et al., 2006: 458).

Throughout Joan's narrative we are made aware of the tension between autonomy and dependence experienced by the narrator. Having proclaimed

that no-one 'can be the boss of the boss' the narrative subsequently depicts 'the boss' as being entirely dependent upon a 'guy's voice' responding to the elevator's 'emergency button', the 'rescue services' and presumably the medical team who respond to the fact that she has 'passed out in the lift through some panic attack.'

Similarly, the narrative also revolves around a tension between a sense of agency and passivity. There is some initial sense of agency in the narrator's devotion to her normal routine, 'I stop off at Starbucks', 'I get my usual coffee.' However, this is upended by the enforced passivity of finding herself 'trapped inside' the lift. Having lost any sense of agency in having to wait to be rescued from the elevator, the narrator is also a passive bystander to her own televised rescue from the elevator, where all she can do is acknowledge that her 'disastrous' encounter has 'appeared' on the news. Even as she returns to her working day, the narrative negates any sense that she is controlling her own workload, 'I'm sitting at my desk. My work load is slowly decreasing.' The passive construction of the second sentence seems merely to bear witness to it. There is little sense of the narrator's control or autonomy in the seemingly despondent statement that: 'Eventually, I would have finished my work and be able to go home.' We get the sense of the present-day child-self being projected onto the possible-self in the future in the image of waiting to be 'able' to leave the work place in the way in which the school child is 'allowed' to leave having finished their work.

Jeanine's account also, at times, negates her sense of agency. She presumes that, 'a lot of my time would be taken up by meetings'; she 'hopes' that

friendships will be formed and 'expects that people will automatically respect her.' This suggestion of a lack of agency underpins the narrative and is further supported by the sense of dialectical tension, which is conveyed throughout, with the accompanying implication that whichever side of each conflict 'wins out', the result is one that has been arrived at by chance rather than design. This sense of conflict is suggested throughout from the initial notion of being torn between home life and career; to the opposition between being 'automatically respected' and 'not always listened to' in the fourth paragraph and further supported in the sense of compromise/balancing in the discussion of having 'some free time and holidays' but 'some parts of my life that I enjoy' having 'to go.'

Shona reinforces a suggestion of passivity. There is something of the 'victim' or 'damsel in distress' evident in the narrator's description. Firstly, the image of the 'torch brandishing mob' positions the narrator as 'innocent victim', at the mercy of an aggressor. Similarly, when 'at a loss' in the early stages of working on her design, she calls upon her 'older brother' and her 'husband' for help, which could be read as drawing upon ideas of male 'rescuers.' She is at the mercy of others' judgments, needing to be 'bolstered by a lot of toast and coca-cola' and praying for 'a happy reply' before emailing what she has so far to 'the company.'

In contrast, Winn describes a high degree of control; although, this control is largely directed at disciplining the 'self.' From her initial acknowledgement that, 'excellent people in any field of work stick to the same routine' to her explanation that, 'Every hour of my time is scheduled – even relaxation.' She

seems to suggest that her rigorous timetabling is in part a means to 'make sure that one does not simply 'burn out' or find themselves as a lonely fifty-year old woman with no children and no husband,' which we understand is the narrator's 'feared possible self.'

The narrator describes the heavy responsibility experienced in her work as a neuro-surgeon; she juxtaposes the action of a small, involuntary 'sneeze' against the devastating consequence: 'destroy a life.' The tiny action, which the surgeon would not be able to control, is demonstrated to have an immense impact, perhaps alerting us to the importance for the narrator of maintaining control over the areas where she can. In this section of the narrative, relationships with the patients, emotional reaction or a connection of any kind are viewed as beyond the narrator's control and therefore are positioned as the 'enemy.' There is also something of Clance and Imes' 'Imposter Syndrome' (1978) and some of the 'inner barriers' suggested by the 'Internal barriers to eminence' literature (2.4) in the depiction of this moment.

For Isabella, although the narrative suggests a high degree of autonomy over her life and work, there is a subtle positioning of her 'work' as the antagonist. Towards the close of the narrative we learn that the narrator, despite seeming to be in control in the workplace, is only 'Finally' able to 'leave' her workplace at 'around eight o'clock' leaving her, as usual, with 'no time to cook' and therefore a restaurant meal with friends where they spend a couple of hours, 'complaining about the stresses of our work.' The fact that this experience is shared with 'a group of friends who also have high-achieving careers' illustrates an acceptance of the status quo that this level of 'stress' is part of a

high-achieving environment to be 'complained' about privately rather than challenged. Finally, 'work' is most clearly positioned as a controlling force in the narrator's description that, 'my job would not leave much time for socialising;' despite her eminence, she is undoubtedly at the mercy of the demands put upon her by her 'job.'

Although a generally less than optimistic portrayal of future eminence, Marlene envisages autonomy and action as part of her role. Despite the narrator's protestation that, 'everything I do involves other people as well' the verb choices depict her 'delivering' presentations, 'appointing' staff and 'creating' rules. She enjoys the power of her role: 'having the greatest power (although second perhaps to – the governors) to influence in the school is an incredibly satisfying feeling' and shows the courage of her convictions: 'Despite students' protests it really does help them to learn.'

A textual discursive analysis also revealed a tension between passivity and agency; autonomy and dependence, which again echoes some of the dualities outlined by the 'Internal barriers to eminence' literature (see 2.4). Kit and Marlene depict the most autonomous version of their future selves as eminent women; they are the narratives which also envisage a high degree of activity enacted in their everyday lives and it is their narratives which contain the highest number of dynamic verbs.

A number of the participants also seemed to envisage a kind of dualistic identity between their public and private selves. For Angie, there is some distinction for the narrator between the 'public' self and her private inner world.

She emphasises the inner world as a source of play and creativity: 'in my head, I imagine the scenes, the characters, the dramatic stringed orchestra.' She clearly retreats into this inner world, even when seemingly engaged in the 'real' world: 'Even when I'm out, I imagine back stories for the people I see, I imagine what's going through their head.' Finally, there is the idea that the narrator at times finds it hard to distance herself from the inner world of her own imagination, as she confides the true 'difficulty' with directing is that, 'I try not to get too attached to fictional characters.' This 'truth' is something which she hides from the public, acknowledging that if asked the difficulties with being a director, she replies by lying and saying, 'something obvious like 'my busy schedule,' suggesting that to admit such attachment to the fictional world would be viewed with judgment and suspicion and also alerting us to the clear notion that the narrator consciously 'constructs' her 'self' for public viewing.

Similarly, Louise's narrative vividly depicts the division between the private and public self. The narrator's 'private' self awakes amidst a certain level of chaos, with 'clothes strewn across the floor', 'sleep deprivation' and 'jet lag.' There is a suggestion of isolation in the moment of looking at: 'the phone in my hand without seeing a single word written on the screen' and 'sighing' in response, contrasting to the 'large hall where hundreds of people were already milling' in which the narrator's public self is depicted at the narrative's close. The narrative makes clear that the narrator finds solace in the private world 'inside': 'the blissful realization that I have an hour until the car comes for me.' The juxtaposition of the two sentences: 'I get dressed leisurely, and curl up on the bed with a collection of TS Eliot' and 'My high heels are by the door,' underline the separation between the 'private' and 'public' sphere. The image

of being ‘curled’ upon the bed evokes a child-like fetal state, with the ‘high heels’ being one of the props needed for her ‘public’ identity – perhaps also suggesting the need for a certain type of femininity to be adopted for her public role, or again the co-existence of the present-day ‘child-self’ and the potential adult possible self. This detail also furthers the impression that ‘becoming’ her public self requires effort, preparation and a subsequent performance: ‘Half an hour and two espressos later, I feel ready to face the world’; ‘My speech is memorized’; ‘After shaking a myriad of proffered hands and smiling until my face ached,’ perhaps suggesting an inherent ‘inauthenticity’ in the development of a ‘public self.’

The divide between the internal and external is further illustrated in the narrative’s use of poetry and prose. In the first half of the narrative, the narrator’s poetry seems to be a private expression of her internal world. She makes meaning from what she sees around her, as with the poem she creates from her observations of the ‘small girl’ who ‘stands alone, hands reaching to the sky.’ Interestingly, in the transitional space of the car with the ‘Chairman of the American Literary Association’, the narrator is silent: ‘He talked about his children, and as he talked, I watched,’ but her ‘voice’ is not silenced and is expressed in a damning haiku: ‘I pictured this man in a haiku, to pass the time.’

Twisted band of gold

Fattened fingers, loutish words

Masks sea of worry.

She acknowledges the power that her poetry affords her: ‘Many people do not realize the dangers of spending time with someone who essentially notices

things for a living; and so are never aware of just how much they give away to me, even without words.'

Through all of these examples, perhaps we are seeing the media discourse identified by Ringrose (2007) which treats the 'newly successful girl' in a manner which is, 'both wildly celebratory and deeply anxiety ridden,' (2007: 482) internalised and reflected back by the participants' narratives, hence the continuous sense of internal division between the conflicting 'selves' which the gifted girl recognises she must navigate between.

4.12 Being an eminent woman can be a source of passion, enjoyment and 'flow.'

Csikszentmihályi (1990) identifies 'flow' as an experience of complete absorption with the task at hand, where the level of challenge is high and the person's skill levels are a good match. Nakamura and Csikszentmihályi (2009) went on to identify the six components of 'flow' including: intense and focused concentration on the present moment; a sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity; a distortion of temporal experience, one's subjective experience of time is altered and an experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding. In their depiction of their work as a source of passion and enjoyment, the constant comparative analysis of the data pointed towards the presence of 'flow' for some participants, and contrastingly its marked absence for others, as part of the imagined lives of the 'eminent' women. In line with Barbara Kerr's (1985) emphasis upon the central importance of 'falling in love with an idea' (see 2.2), we come to understand that a strong

sense of purpose and passion for work are integral for the gifted girl to build the necessary resilience and determination to become the 'eminent' woman.

In terms of the existence of elements of 'flow' in the participants' narratives, there is the sense of a 'distortion of temporal experience' and an 'intense and focused concentration on the present moment,' as Kit describes 'For the next 3 and a bit hours, she thanked each person who came to see her and took pictures with them,' as though time has passed without her noticing. This is similar to Kit's level of absorption, as she 'had stayed up late to finish editing her tutorial for her followers on YouTube.' There is also the idea that the activities pursued by the 'eminent women' would be viewed as 'intrinsically rewarding,' signposted by the participants' use of 'passion': 'Whenever I watch a film, I imagine it in my head. The shooting locations, the cameras...Cinema is my passion,'(Angie), 'I would not have much spare time, but I do not think that I will be too upset by this as reading historical novels and watching historical programmes would be how I would choose to spend my time' (Jeanine), 'My writing has always been my passion' (Louise), 'Despite all of its negatives, my work is my passion' (Winn).

Literary analysis of Angie's narrative depicts a varied and interesting life filled with anticipation and the enjoyment of life as an eminent woman. There is little rigid routine and 'Somedays I am insanely busy, and others I can laze about and watch all three extended director's cut Lord of the Rings films.' The narrator travels to a variety of locations: 'I'd be shooting a car chase in Texas on Sunday, then attend a premiere screening on a Monday,' and she is clear that 'this is what makes me happy.' Her work is creative and as such she

describes herself as being without absolute control over her 'output':

'Sometimes I sit for a few hours, staring at a blank screen. Sometimes by 10 o'clock, I am knee-deep in scrunched up balls of notes.'

However, there were a number of other participants where enjoyment and the potential for 'flow' seemed to be lacking. Joan describes being 'in no hurry to get to work', but we could see this as relating to the fact that she is 'unsure what to do in life' and therefore is unlikely to be able to generate a passionate drive to pursue a purpose larger than herself. Marlene seems to suggest that she imagines some of her enjoyment and passion: 'a love of education and passing on knowledge to the next generation' will be lost by attaining the position of eminent head teacher where she would be, 'not really fulfilling a role in actually teaching' and leading her to conclude bleakly that, 'sometimes positions of eminence can lack satisfaction.' There is a similarly disillusioned note to Shona's conclusion that:

It was my dream to be in graphic design, but now I've got it it doesn't seem so great. I don't feel like I can continually stand up and talk to other people about something I thought I wanted to do.

Perhaps there is something of the participant exploring a 'feared possible self' here; the section comes towards the end of the narrative and seems another example of a participant who has been 'working through' the possibility of future eminence during the course of their writing and has come to a 'feared' conclusion: what if what I think I want to pursue is not a source of fulfilment?

Others seem to adopt an arguably realistic perspective, where they acknowledge both the areas of their passionate engagement and the aspects of their future work which may not be so stimulating: 'Occasionally I may have to write down my findings and this may be the most boring part of the job as I am learning nothing new, but overall I think it will be really interesting and I will look forward to going to work' (Jeanine), 'Everyday I get up to think of new ideas. Sometimes I sit for a few hours, staring at a blank screen' (Angie). From this exploration of the extent to which participants viewed their future careers as enjoyable, we might begin to suspect some important factors at work. As Noble et al. (1999) highlight, 'In order to develop their talents in the face of...obstacles, women must cultivate a number of protective factors, known collectively as 'resilience.' (1999: 144) and in order to have such 'resilience,' Noble et al. (1999) cite Sternberg's (1993) finding that 'what is essential is a mindset that allows for and anticipates failures and mistakes' and demonstrates 'optimism in the fact of adversity.' In this light, the ability to anticipate an eminent career in a chosen field as being a source of enjoyment, flow and a means of pursuing a passion, might be important protective factors in maintaining optimism and resilience in the face of the inevitable challenges of pursuing achievement at the highest level. Perhaps the most promising accounts are those which foresee both success and difficulty, as this suggests a level of readiness for the realities which the pursuit of eminence might entail and a 'mindset' which will allow for flourishing.

4.13 Envisaging ‘feared possible selves’ featured in participants’ accounts of future ‘eminence.’

In 2.5.3, I explore the literature on ‘Feared Possible Selves’ and the ways in which the findings of a number of these studies have differed on gender grounds. Although it was not part of the written prompt, a number of the participants in this study detailed their ‘feared possible selves’ as part of their accounts of future eminence. Winn correlates her need to establish a rigorous division of time between work and ‘other goals’, ‘other hobbies’ with the avoidance of ‘burn out’ or of finding oneself, ‘as a lonely 50-year old woman with no children and no husband.’ Nijo also envisages a feared possible self as ‘lonely,’ ‘poor’ and having lost ‘family too soon.’ Both of these accounts seem to support Killeen et al. ‘Imagining oneself as a leader led women more than men to anticipate problems with personal relationships’ (2006, cited in Brown et al., 2010: 570). Similarly, Knox et al. (2000) found that,

For feared possible selves, young men noted physical illness and/or death and general failure. For young women, the most feared possible selves were related to relationships and then physical illness and/or death (cited in Greene and Debacker, 2004: 105).

There is also the sense that a couple of the participants use images of feared possible selves to motivate and discipline themselves in order to achieve highly. Angie describes wondering ‘what would have happened if I gave up.’ She is clear that had she given up, she ‘could be in an office, picking up calls, or in Starbucks serving a coffee,’ and is very clear that that is ‘not what I wanted.’ By preceding this information with the idea that she ‘nearly did’ give up on ‘various occasions,’ we get the sense that avoidance of a feared self

has been a positive motivator. Winn also conveys a strong sense that she uses a 'feared possible self' as a tool to prompt herself towards greater caution and care in her work: 'I feel like if I make a wrong movement, slice the wrong part, sneeze involuntarily, I could destroy a life.'

There is undoubtedly a flip-side to using 'feared possible selves' as motivation. One can imagine that becoming enmired in images of feared possible selves could easily lead to risk aversion. Greene and Debacker (2004) also outline that the motivation of girls and women seems more impeded by negative affect related to fear of failure compared to the motivation of boys and men (Gjesme, 1983a; Halvari, 1991; Halvari and Thomassen, 1997; Thomassen and Halvari, 1996 cited in Greene and Debacker, 2004: 115), which perhaps alerts us to the dangers of avoidance focused motivation. We can imagine that the public-dimension of being recognised as being eminent within a field, could be a potentially fear-inducing potential for someone whose sense of motivation is a fear-based avoidance of future failure.

4.14 Participants imagine a judgmental audience for their writing

Both the use of literary analysis and textual discursive analysis suggested that participants imagined a judgmental audience for their writing. This could imply that participants were alert to the penalties faced by those who flout stereotypical gender roles (see 2.3.9) and to the narrow space of social acceptability between achievement and assertion, and submission and deprecation (see 2.4.3).

In Joan's narrative, the tone of the account shifts from incredulous, to something approaching irony or parody, to anxiety and finally rests on a triumphant note. The opening paragraph sets a sense of a journey that has been travelled between the narrator 'remembering back' to when she was 'merely' a student at secondary school and an almost disbelieving acknowledgment to 'now look at what I had become.' The second paragraph seems to shift the sense of incredulity felt at the narrator's eminent accomplishments as 'a woman who is internationally recognised' from being the perspective held by the narrative voice into being an accusatory, interrogatory stance adopted against some imagined reader, 'Didn't expect that to happen now did you?' This evokes the sense of a nameless, faceless antagonist which is further developed as the narrative continues, perhaps suggesting either some sense that this lack of expectation is part of the narrator's own sense of self or a feeling conveyed to the narrator more generally by the society she seems here to be, almost angrily, addressing. The second paragraph continues by detailing the 'very expensive designer suit' that is worn by the narrator and the decision to 'take my Porsche to work today as my Ferrari is being washed', the hyperbole of which seems to suggest an ironic tone – perhaps there is a hint of parody here about what it means to be 'eminent' in our society; the writer seems to mock the materialism associated with 'success.'

As the account continues, the tone of paragraph 3 becomes somewhat enigmatic. It opens with the sense that the narrator takes no particular joy in the work that has brought her eminence, 'I'm in no hurry to get to work.' It then continues with, 'After all, I am my own boss' and clarifies with 'Not like anyone

can be the boss of the boss.’ There is something in the initial discourse marker, ‘after all’ which again suggests a conversation with an imagined adversary or antagonist where the narrator’s actions need to be justified.

Shona constructs a more intimate relationship with the imagined reader. The tone in addressing the reader is, at points, confessional and collusive: ‘ I’ll tell you something...’ Perhaps there is some sense that the construction of a confidential relationship between the participant and imagined reader, allows participants to highlight feelings of ‘imposterism’ Clance and Imes (1978).

Shona certainly seems to predict elements of the imposter phenomenon in that she is keen to reveal the ‘reality’ of self-doubt beneath the appearance of the eminent woman: ‘after many years of being in the public eye, I’m still terrified of talking to people.’ The narrator is keen to downplay her success: ‘as if I were somebody truly important. I’m not Stephen Hawking or Steve Jobs or anybody remotely like that...’ Interestingly, here the references to other eminent figures are male, as is every other person mentioned in the narrative. The imagined reader is also addressed as if they are passing judgment or critiquing; the narrator offers: ‘Nothing on the kids front (yet), but it’s early days..’ as though in response to an imagined enquiry regarding a lack of children. Similarly, the final paragraph begins with: ‘That’s really only how I feel on some days, when I’m tired or worn out or overworked...’ which suggests the narrator feels she must mitigate the dissatisfaction expressed regarding her ‘dream job.’

A textual discursive analysis of the data also yielded a strong sense of a ‘dialogue’ between the participant, or her imagined eminent self, and an

imaginary reader. Idiomatic expressions and a conversational tone in Nijo's narrative, 'Like I've said...', 'When I say parties, I mean classy, sophisticated parties' further the sense that the participant will be confiding the 'truth' in the reader and perhaps again highlights the centrality of connection and relationship. Nijo develops her conversational style through elliptical statements suggestive of note form: 'Not like anyone can be the boss of the boss,' 'might seem a bit dramatic, but...'; conversational interjections, 'Oh gawd', 'Oh shoot;' and colloquial discourse markers, 'So anyway.' All of these techniques again seem to suggest a preoccupation with defending oneself against anticipated critique and building a relationship with an imagined reader.

A tentative claim based upon these participants' assumptions of judgement might be to suggest that they are merely accurately anticipating the kinds of gendered scrutiny which an 'eminent' woman may well experience. Noble et al. (1999) cites studies by Angrist and Almquist (1993); Holland and Eisenhart (1990) and Kerr (1995) which explore the implications for women who 'defy' gendered stereotypes of achievement in that they 'risk being perceived or perceiving themselves – as deviant' (1999:144). In light of this we could see the participants' attempts to build a bond with an imagined reader and to anticipate and defend against perceived potential judgments, as a means to avoid the painful, and inevitable, experiences of being a gifted woman accused of being: 'too verbal, too sensitive, too intense, too introverted and too driven' (Noble, 1994, cited in Noble et al., 1999: 44).

4.15 Figurative language reveals a suppressed discourse around eminence

Metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words...on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 8).

Just as the range of metaphor employed to describe the dearth of women in eminent positions both reveals and shapes our perceptions of the issues (see 2.3.2), so at times the figurative language used in the participants' narratives feels more rich and revealing of underlying attitudes towards eminence than overt statement. In Joan's narrative perhaps the most interesting and symbolically rich element is the narrator becoming trapped in an 'elevator.' The episode follows the narrator detailing her wealth and her guilt at not being able to spend a sufficient amount of time with her family, a situation she has recently rectified. With this in mind, the sudden and unexpected episode of becoming trapped in a lift seems to suggest ideas of entrapment, isolation and a loss of control. Perhaps this reflects a struggle to see 'eminence' in a positive light, without inevitable 'retribution.' It is perhaps significant that the narrator needs to be 'rescued' by a man who after 'realising' who she is, immediately acts 'more formally' and prompts his quick reaction to her plight. This is the only point in the narrative where the narrator uses her 'eminence' and ironically all that it enables is her speedier rescue by a male 'rescuer,' recalling hints of Dowling's 'Cinderella Complex' (see 2.4).

For Winn, emotion is personified as an abstract force, which can 'overpower' you, and 'work' is an invader, which cannot be left, but stays with you to be

‘taken home in your mind.’ She describes the need to view patients as ‘inanimate’ and explains that ‘thinking that someone is inhuman helps.’ Interestingly, the simile she employs describes the need to distance herself from the patients, ‘like criminals distance themselves to their victim.’ This goes beyond the sense of heavy responsibility for her actions into the suggestion of herself as a force of harm and damage. The weight of her role, although overtly claimed as her passion, feels daunting and overwhelming.

Marlene’s figurative language suggests the importance of her role to the narrator’s life. The achievements of the school (Marlene imagines herself as the Head teacher) and the narrator’s part in this is likened to: ‘that same sense of pride that I felt when my daughter spoke her first word or learnt to ride her bike.’ The metaphor is extended and explained, ‘I consider the school my other daughter which although I did not create, I shaped to make my own.’ As well as conveying the hugely important role the narrator places upon her work, there is also the further suggestion of the narrator’s high degree of imagined control and influence as she has ‘shaped’ the school to be her ‘own.’

Interestingly, this conflation of home and work is the only potential allusion to a life outside of work, and even here it is used merely as a reference to help clarify the way the narrator feels about her professional success. As the narrative closes, the imagery of ‘the sky darkens’ and the narrator is left to ‘see everyone leave’ ending on an isolated, more sombre note, perhaps returning the reader to the idea of ‘sacrifice’ being necessary for success.

As an eminent poet, much of Louise’s narrative is symbolic; the episode, which focuses on the little girl and balloon, seems particularly rich and

resonant. Firstly, the balloon 'drifting' past seems to contrast the car, which is 'coming for' the poet. The contrasts continue in the 'vibrant red' of the balloon set against the 'grey' of New York. When read in the context of the narrator's eminence, perhaps we could see a certain reluctance to inhabit the 'striving' world in which she finds herself and a yearning for the 'drifting' and 'acceptance' of the little girl, perhaps a version of herself or former self, which she sees from a distance. Similarly, the 'red balloon' standing out against the grey New York skyline seems a symbol of 'eminence': of 'standing out' at the pinnacle of a career. The narrator observes as the little girl below watches the balloon drift away and admires the way in which she seems, 'neither devastated by its loss nor about to have a tantrum over its parting.' There is a stillness and neutrality in the little girl's reaction and, if read symbolically, perhaps a certain ambivalence towards the 'soaring' needed to reach the poet's state of eminence.

The poem written in response to the image of the little girl and balloon gives further suggestions regarding the narrator's perceptions of eminence. The first section of the poem seems to inhabit the balloon's perspective, 'The vibrancy of freedom/Daring/ To soar above the elemental/ Grey of mundanity/ Hopes rise,' which could be read as a celebration of 'rising above' career norms; of the 'freedom' and 'daring' that it takes to 'soar' to exceptional career success. Interestingly, the tone changes in the middle section of the poem: 'And the drop of blood/ Floats/On stony expanses.' With the imagery suggesting threat and danger, perhaps the 'danger' of success. The perspective alters to an observation of the balloon, rather than embodying the balloon, introducing the idea that the sense of threat comes from the perspectives and 'stony'

judgments of others. This idea is furthered in the sinister image, which follows of: 'deep pooling eyes/Watch/And wonder at the courage/of the mistake.' The 'daring' of the balloon's initial rise has become 'the mistake,' particularly in the watchful eyes of others. Finally, the poem returns to a more positive note: 'It grows/In strength, in liberty/Leaving the grey/So far below,' concluding with a sense of hope in the idea of attaining eminence perhaps.

4.16 Conclusions

In looking back across the headings which formed the basis of this chapter and mapping these back upon the areas which I explored in Chapter 2, certain unifying conclusions begin to present themselves. There is an emphasis upon the individual and the internal; there is a high degree of correlation between the difficulties envisaged by participants and the real barriers outlined in the 'Women in the Workplace' literature (see 2.3.8) and there is a high degree of ambivalence around whether 'eminence' represents a positive future path. Chapter 5 will outline these conclusions in greater detail, re-visit and respond to the initial research questions and evaluate the potential contribution to new knowledge made by this study.

Chapter 5- Conclusions and next steps

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws conclusions from the analysis of the narratives collected as part of this study, in light of the literatures pertaining to these areas and in response to my initial research questions which were:

- To what extent do high-achieving secondary schoolgirls hold positive perceptions of an 'eminent' possible self?
- To what extent do the students' narratives predict/reflect the internal/external barriers to female eminence depicted in the literatures?
- Do the 'possible selves' narratives of high-achieving secondary schoolgirls predict any of the concerns/difficulties experienced by 'eminent' women in the 'Opt-Out' literature?

Having explored my data from multiple perspectives, the conclusions I have reached fall under three broad headings: high-achieving girls hold an ambivalent perception of future eminence; the potential barriers to eminence which they foresee are personal and internal; high-achieving girls' perceptions of future eminence frequently anticipate the difficulties and challenges foregrounded by the 'Opt-Out' literature and finally a discussion regarding the optimistic and pessimistic outlooks which can be potentially drawn from this small scale research project. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on ways forward and reflections on ways in which the project has impacted upon, and will continue to have implications for my own professional practice.

5.2 High-Achieving girls hold an ambivalent perception of future eminence.

My first research question was: To what extent do high-achieving secondary schoolgirls hold positive perceptions of an 'eminent' possible self? The answer suggested by this study is that high-achieving girls hold an ambivalent perception of what future eminence might entail. When read as a whole, the 10 narratives produced by participants in response to the written prompt to describe 'a day in their life as an eminent woman in the future' tell a varied, yet at times unsettling story. The participants were united in rejecting any idealised version of what it might mean to be an eminent woman in their chosen field. The narratives, whilst at times suggesting a passion and purpose in their work, are also underpinned by details of the exhaustion and juggling which they envisage would characterise their lives. It is worth noting that this could be in part the result of the way in which participants perhaps envisaged themselves as a potentially different 'self' as part of a 'possible' future, but supplanted this imagined, adult self onto the world as it is, without envisaging a potentially different 'possible world' for their 'possible self' to inhabit.

The data seems to suggest that the participants engaged with a sense of the connotations of 'eminence' as 'standing out', as opposed to the less problematic concept of 'high-achievement.' In my initial constant comparative analysis of the data, I identified 'concern with the perceptions of others', 'isolation' and a focus on 'feared possible selves' as themes. Participants seemed to acknowledge the inherent 'threat' they might pose as 'eminent' figures, assuming that they would be the focus of judgement and criticism and

may be potentially isolated. These conclusions seem to support the idea that these highly-able girls were aware of social norms and attitudes which posit the 'self-confidence' needed to 'create and grasp opportunities' as being 'highly valued in males but discouraged as immodest in females' (Arnold et al., 1996: 435). Perhaps this study supports Noble et al.'s finding regarding the continued presence of gendered expectations and the resulting difficulties when 'women defy these stereotypes and risk being perceived – or perceiving themselves as deviant' (Arnold et al., 1996: 144). Certainly the preoccupation with a perceived 'judgmental audience' and critical internal voice seems to echo the finding that: 'many gifted women report painful experiences of being criticised for being 'too verbal', 'too sensitive,' 'too intense,' 'too introverted' and 'too driven' (Arnold et al., 1996: 144).

Perhaps surprisingly, aside from the expectations of exhaustion and over-scheduling, the narratives did not seem to envisage the benefits which we might expect of an 'eminent' position. The sense that an eminent position might potentially involve status, autonomy, material wealth and power were not themes which emerged strongly from the data. Where these themes did emerge, they seemed to co-exist in relation to their binary opposite: narratives depicted the tension between chaos and control; agency and passivity; freedom and entrapment. The latter observation might support Ringrose's conclusion that the identity of the 'successful girl' is one wrought with contradictions and tensions: 'the discursive constitution of the successful girl also entails that both feminine and masculine qualities are to somehow be juggled, creating massive contradictions for girls' (Ringrose, 2007: 474). The former seems to support Hewlett's (2007) finding that women were less likely

to be motivated by some of the traditional factors associated with high-ranking positions and instead were found to value: 'high-quality colleagues', the ability to 'be myself' in the workplace, 'flexibility', 'collaboration,' 'a sense of giving back to society' and 'recognition' above 'high income' or a 'powerful position' (Hewlett, 2007: 51). Given the importance of 'connection' and 'recognition' here, we can perhaps see more readily the tension involved in pre-supposing an 'eminent' position which might impact upon relationships which are still underpinned by an expectation of conformity regarding acceptable gender roles and behaviours.

In terms of their ability to combine different aspects of their future lives, the narratives tend to be dominated by one sphere or another, rather than exhibiting a high degree of multiple roles co-existing. Joan concentrates upon the importance of her identity as a mother and owner of a luxurious home, seeing her role as 'eminent' 'doctor or dentist' as a means to provide her with the necessary wealth to enable her lifestyle. At the other extreme, a number of participants envisage their 'eminent' career as entirely dominant and do not mention the existence of children or a significant other. As in Spielhagan's research (1996) the participants seemed to resist the 'superwoman stereotype' and perhaps circumvented the difficulties of combining career and family by ignoring one sphere entirely. Again, this was also supported by Spielhagan's finding that: 'Subjects in the middle group (ages 14 through 16) expressed the most ambivalence about the ability to combine career and motherhood, and a few were reluctant to try' (Spielhagan, 1996, cited in Arnold et al., 1996: 206).

The importance of this study and further work is in part to draw attention to the origins of the struggle for gender equity at the highest levels; highly-able young women clearly foresee difficulties with leading a life as a potentially eminent woman. This work should prompt us to re-examine how early these negative perceptions begin and to explore the ways in which we can support highly-able young women to not merely look at a system and lifestyle which they do not want and 'choose' to 'opt-out' before they have even begun, but to gain a sense of agency regarding their ability to 'shape' and 're-shape' existing institutions and lifestyles into realistically workable models for female progression.

5.3 Potential barriers to eminence have been internalised

My second research question asked: To what extent do the students' narratives predict/reflect the internal/external barriers to female eminence depicted in the literatures? In this study, it was the 'internal barriers' that dominated the participants' narratives. In all that is written about 'glass ceilings' and externally imposed barriers to progression, the participants in this study did not foresee external barriers to their success as an eminent woman. It is worth considering that had the narrative prompt invited the participants to describe their 'journey' towards an eminent position, then this might have been more evident. However, in these descriptions of a 'day in their life' as an eminent woman, the participants do not depict a real sense that there is an antagonistic force or limit to their satisfaction and success from outside themselves. In part, we might see this as being connected to the participants' age, developmental stage and a lack of direct experience of barriers to progress emanating from beyond themselves. Three of the participants do

acknowledge that the combination of their gender and eminent status is still something of a rarity: 'People say it's harder for a woman to be a director, and I believe them.' 'Honestly, I don't think anyone expected A WOMAN to ever be so successful,' 'He [imagined male authority figure] began declaring his admiration of my work, the courage of my topics, how fantastic it is to see a woman succeeding in this field.' However, all three make these comments in a brief, cursory way and go on to be optimistic in their conclusions: 'But I did it.' 'Things are finally changing' suggesting that they do not see gender alone as a limiting factor.

Participants seem to envisage a more internal battle where they must find ways to 'live with this much responsibility' by 'distancing themselves' or take control of their emotion by 'taking deep breaths....1....2..1...2' or reminding themselves of underlying purpose: 'Sometimes despairing at myself at having created a rule which causes myself so much discomfort I have to remind myself of the reason why it is in place.' The antagonistic force in these narratives is not a patriarchal one or source of external oppression but the threat of chaos and uncontrolled emotion. Whether it is Joan's 'passing out' through some kind of 'panic attack' in a lift, the sense of panic invoked by Nijo forgetting a scheduled engagement, 'What? What do I do?' or Shona's feelings of being, 'swamped with half-formed ideas,' the narratives sense of being 'out of control' is conveyed as a potent, feared state. In order, then, to maintain a desired sense of 'control', many of the participants were clear that they must adopt, 'precise scheduling', 'drill habits' and modify and balance their own thinking through self-talk: 'I suppose the teachers are not all so distant as it may always seem to me,' 'This will irritate me but I will learn how

to deal with it.’ The sense that the only battle to be fought is an internal one and the idea that further ‘self-control’ will yield reward and success seems to powerfully echo the suggestions made by Ringrose (2007), Pomerantz and Raby (2011), Beck (2001) and Bauman (2008) of the neo-liberal emphasis on ‘individualisation.’ In an absence of any acknowledged ‘socially created problems’ for these imagined ‘eminent women’ then we might see evidence of Bauman’s conclusion that: ‘whatever happens to the individual will be retrospectively interpreted as another confirmation of the individual’s sole and inalienable responsibility for their individual plight-adversity as much as success’ (Bauman, 2008: 90).

5.4 High-achieving girls’ perceptions of future eminence frequently anticipate the difficulties and challenges cited in the ‘Opt-Out’ literature.

Finally, my third research question asked: Do the ‘possible selves’ narratives of high-achieving secondary schoolgirls predict any of the concerns/difficulties experienced by ‘eminent’ women in the ‘Opt-Out’ literature? As the title to this section suggests, there was a high degree of overlap between the difficulties and challenges cited by the mid-career eminent women cited in the ‘Opt-Out’ literature and the projected futures of my participants. As discussed in the literature review, Belkin’s (2003) original discussion of the ‘Opt-Out revolution’ explored the many reasons for high-performing women in high-performing positions ‘opting out’ of their careers. Alongside the desire to spend more time with children, Belkin also concludes that ultimately: ‘the exodus of professional women from the workplace isn’t really about motherhood at all. It is really about work.’ A number of the women who Belkin speaks to describe the

pressures of a 'fifty hour week which was becoming sixty,' and the stress and exhaustion inherent in 'commuting, navigating office politics' in pursuit of a 'prize I was learning I didn't really want.' I was intrigued by the extent to which participants in my study seemed to predict, in detail, the daunting and relentless image of work, which is borne out by the reality described by many successful women who subsequently chose to 'opt-out.' The narratives in this study with their 'eighteen hour shifts', alarms sounding at 'three o'clock', waking but 'not feeling refreshed', working until 'around eight o'clock' or 'through the night' seem to illustrate the patterns of 'extreme work' described by Hewlett (2007). Hewlett details the rise in 'extreme work' entailing increased hours and ever-greater demands on the employee and the concomitant decline in female employees maintaining these 'extreme jobs' over extended periods of time. Hewlett identifies that the intensity of this new level of commitment to work has a negative impact on the sustainability and progression of female employees and ultimately, she concludes that, 'one immensely convenient, unintended consequence of extreme jobs is the way in which they reinforce and perpetuate male hegemony' (Hewlett, 2007: 88). The relevance of Hewlett's study to my own data seems to be that if her research concludes that the reality of the increasingly 'extreme' nature of certain work is an off-putting factor for women already in employment, then what will be the case for these high-ability girls who already seem to envisage the onerous intensity of what an 'eminent' position might involve even when asked to imagine it within the realms of 'possibility'? Surely, the finding that Belkin (2003) reaches that: 'As these women look up at the "top," they are increasingly deciding that they don't want to do what it takes to get there,' seems to be supported by this small data set. The question then becomes,

why do these highly able girls/women not set about attempting to change the structures which are currently part of what is expected at 'the top'?

5.5 A story with two endings: The bleak future of female eminence

A bleak conclusion to draw from this data could be to suggest that given the lonely, exhausting, intense existence envisaged by a number of the participants when discussing potential future 'eminence', it is hard to imagine that many would choose to 'make real' the 'possible self' which they construct. Rather than being concerned about women 'opting-out' of the highest-echelons, perhaps we need to concern ourselves with the idea that many of our most-able young women may not even 'opt-in' as they do not foresee an appealing life at the top from the very outset. This reluctance and/or inability to 'opt-in' is inevitably much more nuanced and complex than simply being ascribable to gender alone; the factors which limit young women from ever entering the highest echelons of career achievement are the product of the multiple intersections of ethnicity, class and gender. Within the scope of this study and the data available, I can only acknowledge the greater complexity of the identities of my participants whilst focusing on gender as a contributing factor.

However whether we are thinking of issues of class, gender or ethnicity, the conclusion that these narratives conveyed very little sense of ways in which being an 'eminent woman' may allow you to shape and alter the unending demands or unreasonable intensity of workload envisaged by participants, is one which suggests an acceptance rather than a challenge to the status quo. While these young women may be rejecting the 'male model' of linear, single-

focus career achievement as unappealing, they are not overtly suggesting an alternative or solution. Perhaps we are again left to conclude, like Pomerantz and Raby (2011) that this is part of the changing landscape of feminism:

Instead of the collective political action that characterizes second-wave feminism or the postmodern multiplicity that characterizes third-wave feminism, post-feminism is characterized by neo-liberal individualization, personal choice and the belief that structural inequities are personal problems (Pomerantz and Raby, 2011: 549).

5.6 A story with two endings: The bright future of female eminence

However, there is another way to tell this story....In this version, rather than seeing the participants' narratives as lacking idealism or as painting a negative image of 'future eminence', we might instead read them as a rejection of the assumptions inherent in the written prompt which they were given. The narrative prompt asked participants to write about a 'day in their life' as 'an eminent woman in their chosen field.' The prompt explicitly focused them upon career as the defining feature of their future existence; it did not mention any other aspect of life. It did not prompt them to think about a day in a life where they might describe themselves as 'flourishing' or 'fulfilled' or even 'happy' and therefore maybe there is a degree to which the participants were conscientiously fulfilling the brief, whilst simultaneously rejecting the implicit assumption of a life that would ever be entirely defined by their career success. Writing in 1996, Spielhagan found her female research participants, 'each...spoke emphatically of her intention to define achievement 'by my own standards' and concluded that: 'All these young women want to 'do it all'; but unlike the generation before them, they refuse to do it all at the same time and

with equal intensity' (Spielhagan, 1996, cited in Arnold et al., 1996: 206). In light of this, there could be the feeling that rather than negatively characterising life as an 'eminent' woman, they are rejecting an identity where this 'career identity' is adopted to the detriment of other aspects.

The recent publication and popularity of a range of texts, which see life in terms of a fuller conception of 'flourishing' (e.g. Seligman, 2011) or argue for a broader definition of success (Wax, 2013; Huffington, 2014) seem to signpost a shifting attitude towards the 'extreme' demands of 'top jobs' which the participants in this study seem keenly aware of. In already recognising the difficulties inherent in positions of power, which it took the 'Opt-Out' generation until mid-career to identify, there is the tentative hope that these young women might seek to shape their futures in a way, which might allow for achievement at the highest levels and a broader conception of personal fulfilment. However, the danger remains that unless these able young women are willing to 'opt-in' to the highest echelons of their chosen careers, they will be unable to exert their influence over shaping a new metric for success.

5.7 Evaluating the possible contribution made by this study

Firstly, in terms of the contribution made by this study, I wish to return to the 'silent gap in the discourse' (Francis and Skelton, 2005: 104) regarding the dearth of attention given to the stories of educationally 'successful' girls. I believe this study has taken seriously the call to allow high-ability girls a voice in an educational discourse, which is less interested in hearing anything beyond the 'girls' examination success narrative.' Secondly, in drawing on a 'possible selves' story-writing methodology, this study makes a contribution

to knowledge by allowing a narrative space which makes visible the 'perceptions' held by young women regarding the possibility of future eminence. This differs from the emphasis of both other 'possible selves' studies, which have tended towards broader explorations of work and family life (Pisarik and Shoffner, 2009; Brown et al. 2010; Fetterolf and Eagly, 2007; Lips, 2004), and the emphasis which is often placed upon hearing from existing eminent women, reflecting on their journey and current perceptions (Stone, 2007; Belkin, 2003; Hewlett, 2007; Warner, 2013). Rather than assuming that younger women may hold idealistic views of future leadership, this study takes seriously the idea that the perceptions held by young women in the process of making choices which may affect their careers and working lives, may be crucial to any real attempt to redress the lack of gender parity at the 'top' of the career-ladder. Thirdly, as far as I know the use of all three analytic lenses to explore high-ability girls' perceptions of eminence has not been used before. Although, using Wickens' (2011) study as a model in this regard, this study employs these different analytical angles to the participants' own writing, rather than the young adult novels employed in Wickens' study. This approach has allowed me to explore the data from different perspectives within a single study, mitigating for the weaknesses of one approach by juxtaposing it against an alternative method of 'seeing.' Finally, and perhaps most importantly for an EdD, this study has contributed 'new knowledge' to my own practice and the body of knowledge within my own professional practice, which I shall return to in 5.9.

5.8 Potential next steps in educating high-ability girls and shaping their perceptions of eminence.

In terms of ways in which this project could be taken further, it would be fascinating to replicate the current study with a group of highly-able young men and compare the data in order to potentially explore the extent to which these young women's perceptions were bound by socially constructed gender expectations, or rather by their generational perspective. It would also be interesting and important to re-visit the participants in this current study and to repeat the narrative collection in a decade's time when the participants may foreseeably be in employment, perhaps already on a path towards future eminence. Equally, it would be interesting to compare the 'possible selves' narratives of these high ability girls with the 'real' narratives of a group of 'eminent' women who are currently working to see the extent to which the texts mirror one another.

If we are serious about working to improve the number of women who take up and sustain eminent positions, we need to talk to highly able young women about 'eminence' and more importantly we need to discuss the complexities and ways in which other women have navigated the challenges ahead. If we are going to equip a generation of young women to challenge and shape the institutions and practices which currently limit women's sustained engagement with 'eminent' positions, then we need to equip them with the skills to judge when to question and challenge existing institutions and ways of doing things, rather than just succeeding within them. Perhaps we also need to help young women to understand when issues or difficulties are reasonably situated within a personal sphere and suited to further self-improvement and skill

development and when acting collectively and assigning responsibility for change to social groups or institutions could be a more powerful, less personally exhausting or self-destructive way forward.

5.9 A personal reflection

Finally, I would like to reflect on the impact that this project has had, and continues to have, upon my own professional practice. The most overt change has been to my professional context; over the course of the project, I have worked in three girls' secondary schools and am now working in a high-achieving girls' grammar school, meaning the reading and focus of my project has taken on an even greater relevance in my day-to-day practice.

However, the greatest difference for me is simply that I am talking about the issues raised in this project with the young women that I teach both formally and informally. Whether through choosing to teach '*Top Girls*' (Churchill, 1984) and engaging the girls in writing about what kind of 'success' is being depicted; through directly discussing the representation of women in the media or in politics with my form group; or asking them what they think about 'eminent women' and the reasons for the continued short-fall. In some ways, I am reminded that what I remain engaged in has a historical precedent in the history of feminism and is a form of 'consciousness raising' which I believe continues to be vital.

Beyond the impact of this study upon my own classroom practice, I also plan to share my research with the wider school body. I intend to provide Inset training to other staff members, which focuses not only on sharing my own

study and exploration of literature but also outlines how we might use a 'possible selves' story-writing methodology with our students as part of their pastoral curriculum. The process of writing about and reflecting upon different possible selves could provide a hugely rich platform for discussion between the highly able young women in our context and their tutors and I now feel well-equipped to share ideas about how these activities might be structured. In my current role, as Director of Initial Teacher Training, I also intend to provide a training session for new teachers on issues relating to the findings of this study and the potential for us to use discussion as part of the pastoral curriculum to help students to explore the balance between accepting personal responsibility and an overly individualised response to wider societal issues.

In a project that has been immersed in narratives, I will end with a story. Having taken over a new form group last year, I have, as previously mentioned, taken every pastoral opportunity I could to mention the issues and thinking which underpin much of this project's basis. My form were, as always, politely interested and responsive, but I would say not particularly moved by, or engaged in, the issues which I discussed. In fact, at times I have been surprised by their lack of engagement with an issue, for instance our discussion relating to the online abuse garnered in response to the campaign to get a woman on a bank note ended with the class having concluded that the 'woman should have expected some come back' from putting herself 'out there'. However, more recently there has been a subtle shift. Firstly, a quieter member of the group found me in order to tell me about having seen the new 'Dove' campaign, which discussed 'real beauty' and female self-perception. Our conversation was brief, but it demonstrated an engagement and

recognition that I would be interested in talking about this with her. A similar experience followed when another student sought me out to tell me about a lecture that she had watched given by Mary Beard about the portrayal of women (BBC 4, 2013); she asked whether I had seen it and went on to describe how interested she had been and to explain that she had thought it would interest me. I recognise that these are small examples, but for me they are the first bricks to be laid in the construction of a bridge between my doctoral studies and professional practice and form part of the opening dialogue in a potentially different narrative for the future of 'female eminence.'

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Constant comparative Method

- 1) Read all data
- 2) Make an electronic copy
- 3) Read through files. Underline/highlight parts that seem important. Make a list of temporary constructs.
- 4) Re-read data using list of temporary constructs to check against. Make notes with temporary construct list and references from data.
- 5) Eliminate any temporary constructs that do not seem to have been reinforced in the rest of the data.
- 6) Come up with second-order constructs that seem to make a good fit with data.
- 7) Look through once more with reference to second-order constructs. Once satisfied, these can be labelled 'themes.'
- 8) Think about the themes. How do they seem to connect? Are there any contradictions or paradoxes?
- 9) Find ways of mapping themes e.g. construct mapping/theme mapping.
- 10) Select good quotations or sections from work to illustrate themes.

Jones, 2002: 199

Appendix 2: Participant Narratives

Joan

As I'm on my way to work, I begin looking back on life I remember back to when I was in secondary school where I was merely just a student at Tiffin Girls' School. Now look at what I had become!

I am a woman who is internationally recognized. Didn't expect that to happen now did you? So anyway, I'm walking to my car, ready to go to work. I'm all suited up as usual – in my very expensive designer suit. I've decided to take my Porsche to work today as my Ferrari needs to be washed.

As I'm driving to work, I stop off at Starbucks. I'm a regular customer so the staff all know me. I get my usual coffee; I can't go to work without it. I mean , what sort of high class business woman doesn't get a coffee on the way to work?

I'm in no hurry to get to work. After all I am my own boss. Not like anyone can be the boss of the boss. I know that I have a mountain of work waiting for me. After all, I had just gone on a month's vacation with the family.

To be an eminent figure in your career, I believe that you need to have a balance between your work life and social life. There is no point throwing yourself into your work. If you have money, you need to be able to be happy and spend time with your family, not continue trying to make more money. To be honest, I felt guilty about how little time I had spent with my husband and children that I had decided to take them on holiday, spend some quality time, get away from work for a while.

I'm in the elevator. Oh shoot. The lift is stuck. I'm trapped inside. Why's it not moving?!? I press the button for emergency and a guy's voice appears over the line. He realizes who I am. I hear him say my name. His tone of voice changes – suddenly sounding more formal. Within a few minutes of calling him, I can already hear the rescue services outside. They're trying to get me out.

An hour passes before I am finally out. I am taken into the hospital, just to see if I'm alright. Might seem a bit dramatic, but considering I passed out in the lift through some panic attack – the precautions seem necessary.

I arrive back to work, I'm completely fine. The TV in my office is playing. I see my face on the news. My disastrous elevator journey has appeared in the news. Oh gawd.

I'm sitting at my desk. My work load is slowly decreasing. The mountain now looks like a small hill. Eventually, I would have finished my work and be able to go home.

I'm now checking the stocks. My work at the financial office is almost over. Considering we are internationally recognized and based in the centre of New York – centre of finance. I'm not really surprised at how much work I had.

After a busy day at the office, I head down to my other business. It's not technically a business. It was a kind of charity/trust which I had started. When I had moved up within my career, when I had become successful, I had opened my own charity. It promotes a number of different causes.

Through this charity, I was able to help many disadvantaged children. It is a charity mainly focused around aiding children being in very close contact with 'Great Ormond Street Hospital'.

I thought it was time that the volunteers needed a break. I sent them home early. I can take over from here for now.

I realize how lucky I am to have come this far. I have my own business, financial centre and charity.

Today was actually pay day. I deposit my money into the bank. I also write a cheque – half the money I earned this month would be going into the charity.

It's hard work running a charity. But it's even harder when you also have a business to look after. It's worth it though. We need to raise our funds – we need to be able to help every child that we can.

My day so far has been rather busy. But I finally made it. I'm driving home, so that I'll be in time to pick up the kids from school. While driving I am reflecting on the way things panned out.

I believe I have been very successful in my career. I have got to where I want to be. I've got the job I wanted and through this job, I'm able to make money to be able to be put to good use. Honestly, I don't think anyone expected a WOMAN to ever be so successful. I might be the first woman to have this kind of high role – as it usually was men who had these sorts of jobs/roles – but things are finally changing.

Nijo

As an adult women, I would like to be successful, wealthy but most of all happy. My idea of happiness is living in a large house, close to where I live now, married and with children; two or three, no more. This will sound shallow but I want to be a decently attractive person, hopefully I haven't gained any weight, even after having children. I would never get any form of surgery, I would rather look like myself. As an eminent figure, I would like to be my own boss. Preferably, I would like to own a surgery or dental practice that I would run with my husband. I want it to be a private clinic as then I could be richer.

Firstly in 10 years time I would start my day by waking up in a large beautifully designed house. I would get ready in my ensuite bathroom and walk in wardrobe. I would wake up my children so they could get ready for school. My parents and my husband's parents would live with us in their separate rooms, both with ensuites and walk in wardrobes. I really want to make sure my parents are happy and I want to earn enough so they have the choice of if they want to work. Like I've said, and continue to emphasise, my house will be like a dream house and we will have family breakfast in an exquisitely designed kitchen. After dropping my children at school (either a religious or private primary school), I would head to my own work, which I own with my husband. Since I'm unsure what to do in life, I can't really expand here. It will either be a medical or dental clinic, whichever one I choose. By 35, my oldest child should be no older than 9 and no younger than 7. I do want to get married relatively young, no younger than 24, no older than 28. I will buy my children and parents expensive things they'll love, especially for my mum. I will be quite a strict parent in terms of homework and cleaning. I would want them to study hard and emulate my success, and me and my parents at least will make sure they do that. As a woman, I will regularly treat myself. This includes shopping weekly if not daily and going to spas and parties often too. When I say parties, I mean classy, sophisticated parties.

Also, I would take my family on holidays all the time. When my children are young we will definitely go Disneyland because I love that place. I will definitely go on holidays with my friends too. I really hope I stay in contact with 2/3 of my friends from secondary school. I would also watch a lot of TV as TV is my life. Hopefully, there's a 50 inch TV in almost every room. In my house I would have a gym and swimming pool as I don't really like going out to public places.

Every Christmas I will stay at home with my family. Every summer we will go abroad unless my children have exams. When it comes to careers, I would like all my children to be Drs, whether that be a doctor, dentist or obtaining a PhD.

In terms of materialistic objects, I would like to have loads of clothes but not too many shoes. I will like to have 3 cars (shared with my husband). An average car, a really expensive Porsche one and an expensive Mercedes jeep. When I grow up, I don't ever want money to be an issue for me, nor having a loving family and friends. I think as long as I have these I'll be happy.

As a 30-something year old, I don't want to look back on uni days and think my life is so depressing. I want to be equally happy as an 20 year old as I am a 30 year old. I also do want to have relationships before I settle but I don't want to be in a relationship constantly. What I want is to be single with few short term relationships and then just have one long term relationship with who would be my future husband. I know I watch way too much TV.

Another thing that is important for me is that my children embrace their culture and learn language and musical instruments from where I'm from, just like I have. I will give my children every opportunity and make sure they don't pass it up like I did, even though my mum told me I'd regret it. I regret those even as a 15 year old. I don't want to have any more regrets, which is partially what made me successful.

In short, I want a luxury life and I won't lie, money is just as important as family. My biggest fears are being lonely, being poor and losing my family too soon. I would love my parents to be able to see my children's marriages. I also want to keep in contact with my sibling and be close to him as well. And that's really it.

Isabella

As an eminent figure in my chosen career of design, I would wake up at six o'clock in the morning – not feeling refreshed from the nights sleep due to the busy and exhausting day before. I would love alone in an expensive inner-city London flat, only a ten minute walk from my workplace. After waking up I would shower, change into my work clothes, grab my bag and leave my flat. During the walk to my office I would stop by a local café and buy some breakfast to eat on the go.

When I arrive at work I would have five minutes to finish my breakfast and check my emails before being ushered into a meeting by my PA. It would involve the design of a new expensive product and would be attended by some of the most influential and experienced members of the industry. Though I would find the meeting long and mentally draining, I would also enjoy creating ideas and new concepts – especially when my colleagues and I can together produce a new, unique and exciting idea.

After the meeting I would have my lunch break and would walk to a local coffee shop to have a Panini with a friend who works in the offices next to mine. We would discuss our morning activities over lunch and catch up on any news we had missed. My lunch break would not be very long due to numerous work commitments and tasks that need completing, so after a short while I would walk back to the office and leave my friend.

When I return to work I would start to expand upon the ideas produced in the meeting that morning privately, sitting at my desk watching the world go by through the huge glass window opposite me. After an hour or so colleagues who had made appointments with me would come to my office to talk about future products or projects that they had been working on. I would not discuss their ideas or problems in much detail unless it was one that I could see progressing much further in the future. Due to my busy schedule the appointments would not be that long as I am involved in overseeing and developing many projects. I would work like this, swapping between appointments and private work, for the rest of the afternoon and into the early evening – only stopping for two coffee breaks.

Finally, I would leave my workplace at around eight o'clock and would get a taxi to a restaurant on the other side of London, so I could drive with a group of friends who also have high-achieving careers and so have to work long hours. It would be an expensive restaurant, but still quite low key and quirky – we would try to go to a different restaurant every night as normally none of us have time to cook, but we still want a varied diet. We would spend until around eleven o'clock complaining about the stresses of our work and describing our days activities. This would be a part of the day I would look forward to the most, as my job would not leave much time for socializing and I am able to enjoy the money I have worked hard for.

After parting with my friends I would take a taxi back to my flat and as soon as I got home I would have a relaxing hot bath before making myself comfy on the sofa, watching a TV show I have missed on catch up and sipping on a hot drink. I might do some internet shopping and then decide to go to bed.

Winn

It was just a usual day. Alarm sounds at three o'clock and I arise from my bed with bags under my eyes. Sleep deprivation is something that I can never seem to escape from. My beeper makes a squeal and I know that I should leave soon for work. They say that excellent people in any field of work stick to the same routine, day in and day out. They make their exceptional work a habit and I with hesitation, follow suit.

Wake up at three, leave the house by four. Cycle to the hospital everyday and everyday arrive there around five o'clock – just in time for the first daily ward rounds and possibly a scheduled surgery.

My field of choice is neurology. When the word is spoken most people display a sense of awe – to me it is just normal. As an accomplished woman in a very respected field, my work and attention is in constant demand, with people paging me when I am supposed to be 'relaxing.'

This may sound like I am complaining but I am assuredly not. Despite of all its negatives, my work is my passion, I constantly strive to achieve highly in it. Steve Jobs once said that you should never settle for a job because you will never try your best at something you do not like. He was right. When you find your passion and commit yourself to it, you will perform.

My job as a neurologist holds a lot of responsibility as one could probably guess. The brain is a sensitive organ with its many complexities that even I don't fully understand. When operating on someone, I feel like if I make a wrong movement, slice the wrong part, sneeze involuntarily, I could destroy a life. It is hard to live with this much responsibility. I have to distance myself from the patients at times (similar to the way that criminals distance

themselves to their victim) in order to think of them as an inanimate object. Thinking that someone is inhuman helps.

They say the difficulty with being a doctor and handling people's lives is the fact that sometimes emotions can overpower you – your work never really stays at work, you take it home with you in your mind.

Perhaps this is outweighed by the scientific recognition that is gained by being an eminent figure. I should think so. Recognition is everything to a high-achieving academic.

Some people say striving for anything other than God such as money, love or even education and knowledge is bad as one can never really be satisfied. This could be true.

After an eighteen hour shift, I relax. I do the same thing every time – paint, read a novel and spend time with family. One of the major problems about being career-orientated is that there is little time for anything else. But I feel that it is very important to have balance, to have other goals, other hobbies in order to make sure that one does not simply 'burn out' or find themselves as a lonely fifty-year old woman with no children and no husband.

Every hour of my time is scheduled – even relaxation. It is better this way. When there is no distinction between work and free time, one's life can feel disjointed and confusing. I always know when I am working and when I am, I commit fully with no distractions. When I relax, I can enjoy myself without feeling like I am needed in the back of my head. And so with my precise scheduling, I drill habits into my behaviours which eventually seem second-nature. I think Einstein said that 'We are what we repeatedly do' and as a consequence excellence is a habit. I think that this is true and therefore, try to incorporate this into my life.

When the stress of the work day is over, I take my time to relax, catch up with friends and most importantly sleep.

Marlene

I envisage myself as a leading headteacher in the future. Every day is different after wading through the somewhat more monotonous years of teaching the same syllabi for the numerous years before eventually being promoted to the 'top job'. This does not however mean that there are no difficulties or boring tasks for me to complete in this position. I arrive early at school and thankfully be brought a cup of coffee by my assistant as I begin to continue the never ending task of signing off absence requests. Sometimes despairing at myself at having created a rule which causes myself so much discomfort I have to remind myself of the reason why it is in place. After an assortment of dentist and orthodontist appointments, music and dance exams and sadly a relative's funeral I come across a hilariously shocking request 'A trip to Disneyland for two weeks' justified by the fact that 'it was won in a competition.' Not only were these 2 weeks in the middle of term time but actually included this student's first week of GCSEs! Having chuckled to myself for several minutes I imagine myself 30 years ago and how I may have considered my own actions cruel. In fact, despite being surrounded by over 1000 people everyday it can seem like a very lonely job. The students have their friends, respect but have friendly interaction with teachers and either despise or are terrified of me. The teachers themselves have others in their position with whom to gossip and I'm sure some of that gossip is about me. I feel sometimes like the dictator, my staff only enforcing rules because they want to keep their position and students (largely) obeying them because of the threat of punishment. After pursuing a career because of a love of education and passing on knowledge to the next generation, I have passed into a world where I am not really fulfilling a role in actually teaching. Although I do admit that a school needs discipline and a figure that carries out my current duties however as I have discovered, to succeed you sometimes have to sacrifice. Perhaps I am being too pensive and this reflection has been brought on by my lack of breakfast however I definitely believe that sometimes positions of eminence can lack satisfaction. As I do little teaching myself (except save a few cover lessons given to a group of silent, self-conscious students) I do not have that sense of personal achievement when a student improves, learns or succeeds because of my action. I think that I feel that everything I do involves other people as well. I appoint the teachers and they teach the students, I create the rules and the teachers enforce them. It sounds like I'm making it out to be the worst job ever and yet there are good things I have a good relationship with some girls in the sixth form,

particularly the head and deputy girls. Having been able to have a constant overview of each group of children ('young people') growing up through their time here is totally rewarding.

On this morning I am delivering a presentation assembly where I can see those petite year 7s having advanced mathematics competitions. Knowing that my establishment in general has made achievements gives me that same sense of pride that I felt when my daughter spoke her first word or learnt to ride her bike. I consider the school my other daughter which I although did not create, I shaped to make my own. I suppose the teachers are not all so distant as it may always seem to me and having the greatest power (although second perhaps to – the governors) to influence in the school is an incredibly satisfying feeling. After making a range of presentations I head back to my office to meet with the deputy heads to discuss our focuses for the next half term. We decided that the topic of uniform was in most dire need of addressing. Despite students' protests it really does help them to learn and of course the school is very strongly represented in our uniform. I eat lunch reading over some interim reports and am surprised at the ease with which I remember the different children. The afternoon passes slowly yet I seem to achieve little in my work concerning the budget for next year. As the sky darkens I see everyone leave and relieve the caretaker by allowing him to lock up. Another day gone, and another day tomorrow.

Angie

Done. 3 years of hard work and it's finally done. I remember being in high school. My first media lesson. We were doing filming for our second module and I realized it's what I've always wanted to do.

Ever since I can imagine I've always had a fascination for film. Whenever I watch a film, I imagine it in my head. The shooting locations, the cameras used, the exact stage directions given on the script, the composition of the soundtrack. Cinema is my passion. I have had a resolution to go to the cinema once a month. So far, I have kept to this resolution, and every month I go to the Odeon and pick up a box office guide. I scan the films showing, pick the one that I'd like best, buy some popcorn and watch it.

I have discovered so many beautiful films. I saw Life of Pi at the Imax, Deathly Hallows, Skyfall, Xmen First Class, the Avengers, Star Trek, all of these films have fascinated me. I rent foreign films, Amelie, Volver, Valentino and watch them with subtitles, and then without.

I got my first camcorder when I was 11 and I take it with me when I travel.

I worked hard, went to film school, and now, here I am; a director.

I first had an idea for a film at home. I jotted down some notes on a napkin, folded it and put it away. I wrote a script, and made it come to life with the use of a camera. All I ever wanted was for one of my films to be on at cinemas for teenagers to watch and be inspired.

People say it's harder for a woman to be a director, and I believe them. But I did it.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if I gave up. I nearly did on various occasions. I could be in an office, picking up calls, or in Starbucks serving a coffee. That's not what I wanted. This is.

Being a film director has shown me so many amazing experiences. I remember flying to the Amazon to film a scene, meeting people and actors, watching films that spur me to make more.

Seeing people buy merchandise, go to Premieres, has made me realize what a big impact film has on some people. Even though I have just started, even though not many people know me, I know that this is something I have created.

Everyday, I get up, to think of new ideas. Sometimes I sit for a few hours, staring at a blank screen. Sometimes by 10 o'clock, I am knee-deep in scrunched up balls of notes. I make a few calls, shoot some scenes, talk with the staff and crew.

Somedays I am insanely busy, and others I can laze about and watch all three extended director's cut Lord of the Rings films. I have always looked up to directors like Brian Singer, Aang Li, and David Heyman. But from a young age, I didn't know many female directors. That's when I noticed the unfairness. I thought 'I can change that...' 'What if, I actually made a film?'

And I'm glad I did.

I'd always imagine fantasy stories in my head. Superheroes, Aliens, Robots, Elves, Centaurs, Wizards. Comedy and romance never interested me. I take inspiration from mythology; comics and sometimes I think of completely new ideas. Most of them, I know, will never get created into a film. But in my head, I imagine the scenes, the characters, the dramatic stringed orchestra that plays during an intense battle scene, written by Hans Zimmer or James Newton Howard, of course. Even when I'm out, I imagine back stories for the people I see, I imagine what's going through their head.

People ask me 'What's the hardest part of being a director'. In interviews, I'd lie and say something obvious like 'my busy schedule' but in reality, I try not to get too attached to fictional characters.

I believe that a film isn't just a story, but a message and no two days in my life are the same. I'd be shooting a car chase in Texas on Sunday, then attend a premiere screening on a Monday. This is what I enjoy about my job, this is what makes me happy.

Kit

10:00 am....On a summer morning, she wakes up, stretches and turns around to look at the time.

'10 o'clock...' she yawns and falls back into her bed because she went to sleep at 3 o'clock in the morning. The reason? Her job. A YouTuber and the owner of an online shop. Beside her bed, on the desk, was her laptop, many brushes and make up and hair bands. She had stayed up late to finish editing her tutorial for her followers on youtube.

Finally, at midday she finally finds the strength to wake up and get out of her bed. She puts on her slippers and walks out into the bathroom to do her daily routine. After that, she feels more energetic and goes to the kitchen to make her breakfast. On the way, she walks past her dog, who had already managed to mess up her living room and refills her bowl. – Hmm...what should I have? – She thinks as she opens the fridge.

- I guess I'll have salad with...some chicken? – And so, she picked these two out. She lived a very healthy life and tries very hard to not let her job affect her life.

After having breakfast, she rummages through her messy desk to see if she could find her diary since she wasn't very organized. To her, her whole life depended on her diary and phone.

"Aha! I found it!" she shouted out in triumph which caused her dog to bark.

"Let's see...today is the 19th of June..." She flicks the pages to find the date. Underneath that day, or rather, today, was written 'Meet and greet at the shopping centre at 2pm! DON'T FORGET!'

"What!? What do I do? What do I do?" She quickly turns around to look at the time, "It's quarter to one! Um, um!"

She rushes back to her bedroom and quickly changes, does her make up and leaves the house with her dog.

At five minutes to 2pm, she arrives breathing heavily – she had ran most of the way after getting the bus – and before her she couldn't believe what she saw. She knew she had just reached 2,000,000 subscribers on YouTube, however, the number of people that were already there, waiting for her was incredible. Without a warning, she felt her eyes get moist as if she was about to cry.

- Take deep breaths....1,...2...1...2... - She walks slowly to her spot as many eyes followed her.

For the next 3 and a bit hours, she thanked each person who came to see her and took pictures with them. Many also brought gifts with them to congratulate her and to thank her.

As she arrived home with bags of presents and a camera full of photos, she goes to her bedroom to sit on her bed and slowly and carefully, empties the bags one by one onto her bed. With each gift she looked at, each card she read, the more teary-eyed she got. She was really thankful for her gifts and felt really accepted and was glad that she became a Youtuber.

She put each gift in a safe place-or ate some – if they were edible – and went on her computer.

'Thank you guys so, SO much for coming today. I can't even describe how grateful I am. Love you loads xxx' was posted on her Facebook page, and within seconds, hundreds of comments were already posted. She goes on youtube to upload her latest tutorial for a prom – make up and hairstyle – and then goes onto her online shop. She finds many orders and decides to start with DIY products. Plastics, rings, necklaces, dresses, she accepted many things, in hope to make someone else's life happier. When she finished, at 8 pm, she starts to wrap her make up equipments with a handwritten note of thanks to the buyers. She had her own make up brand and brushes which were on high demand. At 9.30, she finishes wrapping the make ups to be sent tomorrow.

She does some exercises in the house, then jogs around the near-by the park and then has dinner. After dinner, she goes to have a shower and changes into her pyjamas. She pets her dog and plays around in bed, then, after her dog falls asleep she goes on her phone to check any new comments or tweets and she would reply to as many as she could. Then at 12.30 am, she switches off the lights and her phone and falls into sleep, looking forward to the next day.

Jeanine

I think that as a historical researcher for writers or production companies, such as the BBC, I would not have much spare time, but I do not think I will be too upset by this as reading historical novels and watching historical programmes would be how I would choose to spend my spare time. I think I will receive a sufficient amount of money from this job but I do not think I will be extremely rich, nor do I want to be. The thing I think will be difficult concerning my home life is if I ever have children. I would not wish for someone else to look after them but also, would not wish to give up my job, so at this point, I would face a great dilemma.

As a historical researcher and consultant, I imagine I will spend a lot of time on the internet or in libraries. I think generally, the job will be quite a solitary thing, however I also think that I will

spend quite a lot of time discussing and learning from others in the field, and hope that friendships will be formed through this. I imagine that I will spend time in archives looking at and understanding historical documents and at this point I may need to use my language skills. Occasionally, I think that I will go on a trip to a historical house/palace where I could observe another's interpretation of those particular times.

I imagine myself employed by one company for many projects, but do not know if this is realistic, as I am unsure if most historical researchers/consultants are free-lance. I hope to be employed by a company as I think this way, more relationships can be formed.

I presume that a lot of my time would be taken up by meetings with directors and /or writers. I think, when I begin this job it may be difficult to make myself heard and respected but as an eminent woman in my field, I expect people will automatically respect me and take my views into account. I anticipated I will not always be listened to, especially when historical evidence restricts the artistic vision of the director or author.

I think sometimes, I will be needed on set to advise actors and set artists on how to present themselves or the set. I think that I will really enjoy these times but think that when there, however eminent I may be, I will not be the most important voice and may, at times be ignored. This will irritate me but I will learn how to deal with it.

As an eminent historical researcher, as opposed to a less important and well known one, I think that I will be requested to work on a project with people or that I will be assigned to more important projects. Unlike in some careers, I do not think being an eminent figure will advantage me financially but I think it may increase the amount of work I get.

I believe being a historical researcher may be a lot of work but I do not think it will be as stressful or as busy as other careers, for example being a doctor. I understand that I will have deadlines but I think that I will be organized enough to meet them without too much worry. Occasionally I may have to write down my findings and this may be the most boring part of the

job as I am learning nothing new, but overall I think it will be really interesting and I will look forward to going to work.

Although I will have some free time and holidays I think some parts of my life that I enjoy now will have to go. For example, I do not think I will have time to play in orchestras, (but I hope I do) and I can see myself using the microwave a lot where meals are concerned. I will have time to see my family and friends often enough to maintain good relationships with both, as well as form new ones.

I think I will experience moments of pride when programmes that I have worked on or contributed to are shown to the public. I am sure that I will gain a fascinating insight into the process of making a film or a book, as well as expand my historical knowledge in a number of areas.

I know that, at times I will have to work with people that I do not get along with, but I do not think this will be particularly difficult for me. However, this is one of the areas I am not looking forward to and think I will be more able to deal with the issue the more experience I have.

Louise

Waking at 6, I stretch and get out of bed, picking up the clothes strewn across my floor as I pick up my phone. Coffee. Lots of coffee. Sleep deprivation and jet lag hang over me, as I take in the hotel room I awoke in; something I had been far too tired to do last night. Bleary-eyed, I look at the sleek body of the phone in my hand without seeing a single word written on the screen. I sigh, and head for the shower.

Half an hour and two espressos later, I feel ready to face the world. I grab my pad and review the speech I'd written, now almost a fortnight ago. I paced the room; practicing my delivery, addressing an imaginary crowd. With the blissful realization that I have an hour until the car comes for me; I get dressed leisurely, and curl up on the bed with a collection of TS Eliot. My high heels are by the door. My speech is memorized. All is well. And then, out of the

window, I see a balloon drift past. Such a vibrant red against the dreamy grey of New York in November strikes me immediately, and abandoning 'The Wasteland', I go to the bay window. On the street below; a small girl stands alone, hands reaching to the sky. It was obviously her balloon, but unlike so many small children would have been; she seems neither devastated by its loss nor about to have a tantrum over this parting. She just stands there, in the middle of the street, hands upstretched, and eyes open. The acceptance on her face, and the simplistic beauty of the imagery struck me; and I rooted through my bag for a pen and drew a chair up to the low table by the window. Smiling, I immortalized what I had seen. It sounds arrogant, to put it that way; but the written word outlives all other means of recording in the most beautiful ways imaginable.

The vibrancy of freedom
Daring
To soar above the elemental
Grey of mundanity
Hopes rise,
And the drop of blood
Floats.
On stony expanses.

Deep pooling eyes
Watch
And wonder at the courage
Of the mistake. It grows
In strength, in liberty
Leaving the grey
So far below.

Naturally, it would need some tweaking, and the imagery wasn't perfect; but it made me smile as I tucked it into a folder. A few minutes later, I was brought back to the grey walled room from the clouds, as my phone buzzed, signaling that the car was ready to collect me.

Gathering my bags together, on impulse I tucked the poem into the envelope containing my speech; and closed the door behind me.

Stepping into a luxury car, as always, felt very unreal, but today I was grateful for the soft leather seats and gentle warmth the car afforded, as even the short walk from the lobby to the car door had made me realize that my shirt and skirt were not thick enough to withstand the November chill. As the car drove off, sleek and sophisticated, I turned to the man on my left. Chairman of the American Literary Association and founding member of dozens of literary prizes; he was a broad man that put me immediately in mind of a hound. But his black eyes were bright and friendly, and as we talked, I found myself warming to him. He talked about his children, and as he talked, I watched. Many people do not realize the dangers of spending time with someone who essentially notices things for a living; and so are never aware of just how much they give away to me, even without words. I pictured this man in a haiku, to pass the time.

Twisted band of gold
Fattened fingers, loutish words
Masks sea of worry.

Finally, we approached the grand cream building; and as he opened my door, he began declaring his admiration of my work, the courage of my topics, how fantastic it is to see a woman succeeding in this field. I was led to a large hall, where hundreds of people were already milling. After shaking a myriad of proffered hands and smiling until my face ached, I finally felt my arm be caught by a green-suited official, who led me to a podium. There, he motioned to a chair, and I sank into it gratefully.

"Ladies and gentlemen," my car companion said, "it gives me great pleasure to welcome you today. This morning, we pay homage to one of the world's leading writers who we have recognized with prize upon prize. The first poet to win the Booker Prize for her collection, and the British Poet Laureate. Both monumental achievements which we are here to applaud her for," He gestured to me, and I replaced him at the lectern.

"Firstly I would like to thank you for the countless honours you have bestowed upon me. My writing has always been my passion; and it is wonderful to think of others enjoying what has been my solace for so many years. As I'm sure you are aware there have been many bereavements in my life, and poetry has assisted me with coping. What I want to tell you today, is what it means to me to see my work appreciated; and to hear that I have helped those in similar situations to those I have been in. I would like to share with you a poem that I have never read aloud before, that I will be using to promote awareness of cancer worldwide. I hope we can make a difference:

Divided by the coldest hand
A vicious fist closed over you.
Don't they know that when you went.
A piece of my heart ripped out too.

I see you only in the world
Where I create the land and law.
They told me that now you were whole
I'll never tell them how I saw

Your pain feed into others,
Scarred by broken glass
I tried to dig every shard out
But I have given up at last

The deepest cuts aren't made by blades
But by the words of the bereft.
The pain we suffer, living on
To lose a love to worse than death.'

My eyes blurred with tears as I sat down, terrified. And then the applause started.

Shona

I wake up from the most terrible sleep I've ever had in my life, if you can even call it sleep.

More like drifting in and out of the confusing whirl of letters and pictures inside my head that I will see in my mind in my every waking (and sleeping, and snoozing) moment, because I am a freelance graphic designer. Design is my life, everything outside it, and everything that makes up the fabric of my existence. I go to sleep in the small hours of the morning thinking about how unsuccessful my last design was, and I wake up thinking it even more. You'd think, by now, after 20 years of battling through the industry, that I would've conquered it all by now, and that I must instantaneously know what people want and be able to envisage perfectly, to the detail, my ideas, rather like Santonix from Agatha Christie's *Endless Night*, a master of his craft, but it does not get easier. At all.

For instance, this particularly horrendous excuse for a night's sleep was due to a company that wanted me to create a whole new brand identity for them – business cards, website, leaflets – the whole package, with very specific requirements. Being the consummate designer I am, I was very willing to work through the night to meet the deadline but in truth, I was at a loss over what to do. So for the first hour or so into the morning, swamped with half-formed ideas and garish colours and typography too inconsistent with anything to be appropriate in the world of business, I set about running around my garden playing with Ruff, my golden Labrador. Sometimes I get him to track in a tin of paint and walk across the floor of our conservatory as a last-ditch attempt to try to coax some creativity out of the colours and patterns he stamps out. Mostly it just relaxes me, as well as making more of a mess in my home in the name of work.

It's the third hour and I am Skyping my older brother, who seems to pull all-nighters every night and he isn't very inspiring, but he's a good laugh.

I think about Skyping my husband too, but he's in the middle of a meet in New York. He's a designer too, so I don't think too much of the phrase 'opposites attract.' It's nice having

someone who can match your scope of thought, and we design and make each other our own presents for birthdays and Christmases. It's become a bit of a competition actually. Nothing on the kids front (yet), but it's early days and we don't want to be tied down with more than we can cope with.

By hour five, I have a rough idea of the overall theme and colour scheme that would suit the company, an idea that is bolstered by a lot of toast and coca-cola, so I email what I have so far to the company and pray for a happy reply. Once, I got an angry email complaining about my finalized design for a chocolate box, and oh how terrible an evening that was. I go to bed at 6am and barely manage two hours.

After a quick run and a game of pool with myself, I receive an email. Thankfully, it's not the company brandishing torches in mob-like fashion, but it's from an equally daunting source. The National Sustainable Design Challenge is coming up and the board of organisers would like me to make a speech and to act as the main judge on the panel. I'll tell you something – after many years of being in the public eye, I'm still petrified of talking to people as if I were somebody truly important. I'm not Stephen Hawking or Steve Jobs or anybody remotely like that, and although my career has gone well so far, I don't think I will have the capacity to carry on with it as I get older.

It was my dream to be a in graphic design, but now I've got it it doesn't seem so great. I don't feel like I can continually stand up and talk to other people about something I thought I wanted to do.

That's really only how I feel on some days, when I'm tired or worn out or overworked, though, and I can mostly work through it. My parents have told me it's like this with any job, and I hope that's true. Sometimes I love it with all my heart, and sometimes I just don't.

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form



ETHICS COMMITTEE

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

An exploration of the perceptions of future 'eminence' among high-achieving secondary school girls, through 'possible selves' narratives

Brief Description of Research Project:

This study will involve collecting narrative data from 10 high-achieving secondary school girls and looking at how they picture their life, if they were to become 'eminent' in their field in the future. You will be asked to respond to the following prompt:

Imagine your future life as an adult woman. In whatever your chosen field, I want you to imagine that you have become An 'eminent' figure. I would like you to describe a day in your future life as an eminent woman. I would like you to provide as much detail as possible about every aspect of your imagined life.

You will write your response to this prompt. The whole session will last approximately 1 hour.

I will then analyse what you have written and compare the content of your writing with the other participants, looking for themes and patterns. I will write up my study and use the writing that you produce as part of this evidence. Your name will not be used, so your writing will be used anonymously. You will receive a summarised copy of the final report.

Investigator Contact Details:

Kristina Jackets
University of Roehampton
Erasmus House
Roehampton Lane
London
SW15 5PU
Email: jacketsk@roehampton.ac.uk

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.)

Director of Studies Contact Details:

Name: Dr. Julie Shaughnessy

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Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

What is this research about?

The title of the research is: An exploration of the perceptions of future 'eminence' among high-achieving secondary school girls, through 'possible selves' narratives. This basically means that I am interested in how young women imagine their lives would be if they were to attain 'eminence' in their chosen career. By 'eminence' I mean that you 'stand out' in your career because you are recognised as someone that is highly accomplished in that area.

Who is doing this research?

I am an English teacher and I am also doing an EdD course at the Universities of Roehampton and Kingston. An EdD is a professional doctorate, so it is a little like a PhD, but it is one that you do while you are still working as a teacher. You use it as a way to become an even better teacher or to help improve things about the way we teach and learn in schools.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen at random from a class list. I wanted to work with students with high academic ability, so I chose to work with your school.

What will I have to do?

You will have to write a narrative (like a story/description) about what you imagine your life would be like if you were to become an 'eminent woman' in your chosen career. This is not

an 'English test' and I am not marking you in the way that you are marked in English lessons; I am interested in your thoughts and ideas.

How long will it take?

1 lesson.

What will happen if I don't want to take part?

If you don't want to take part, that is absolutely fine and you just need to say so!

What if I say 'Yes' and then change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any stage and there will be no consequences. You just need to tell me that you don't wish to take part.

What will happen to what I write?

I will type up what you have written and you will get a copy of this, so that you can check that I have read your handwriting correctly etc. I will then read what you and all the participants have written really carefully, looking for themes and patterns. I will analyse the writing and use parts of it in my project. If I use your writing in my project, your name will not be used at any point, nor will any description of you or the name of your school. You will be completely anonymous. Your writing will be stored anonymously at the University of Roehampton for 10 years. If you decide during the project that you no longer wish to take part, you can have your writing returned to you and I will delete/destroy any additional copies.

Will I get a copy of how you've used my writing in the research?

Yes, I will produce a summary of the research and all participants will receive a copy. If you wanted a full copy of the report through email (although it will be long – around 60,000 words!) then just email the address given below to request one.

What do I do if I/or my parents have any more questions regarding this research?

You or your parents can contact me at any point on the email below:

Kristina Jackets

jacketsk@roehampton.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Participant prompt



Imagine your future life at any point between age 21 and your death. In whatever your chosen field, I want you to imagine that you have become An **‘eminent’*** figure. I would like you to describe a day in your future life as an eminent woman. I would like you to provide as much detail as possible about every aspect of your imagined life.

***I would like you to think of ‘eminence’ in relation to your future career. Eminence comes from the Latin word ‘eminere’ meaning ‘to stand out.’ Therefore, imagining yourself as an ‘eminent woman’ will mean that you ‘stand out’ in your career as someone of high achievement, who is worthy of recognition.**

Please use as much of the next 1 hour as you wish to write your account. Please do put the number that I have given you, instead of your name onto any sheets of paper that you have written on.

Thank you.